RUTH FIELDING AT SUNRISE FARM

ALICE B. EMERSO

TO PARENTS

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"WHY, SADIE RABY! WHO'D EVER EXPECT TO SEE YOU HERE?"

Ruth Fielding At Sunrise Farm

OR

What Became of the Raby Orphans

BY

ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "RUTH FIELDING OF THE RED MILL," "RUTH FIELDING AT SNOW CAMP," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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Books for Girls

By ALICE B. EMERSON

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RUTH FIELDING AT SUNRISE FARM
Or, What Became of the Raby Orphans.

RUTH FIELDING AND THE GYPSIES
Or, The Missing Pearl Necklace.

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RUTH FIELDING AT SUNRISE FARM

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RUTH FIELDING AT SUNRISE FARM

CHAPTER I

SWEET BRIARS AND SOUR PICKLES

THE single gas jet burning at the end of the corridor was so dim and made so flickering a light that it added more to the shadows of the passage than it provided illumination. It was hard to discover which were realities and which shadows in the long gallery.

Not a ray of light appeared at any of the transoms over the dormitory doors; yet that might not mean that there were no lights burning within the duo and quartette rooms in the East Dormitory of Briarwood Hall. There were ways of shrouding the telltale transoms and—without doubt—the members of the advanced junior classes had learned such little tricks of the trade of being a schoolgirl.

At one door—and it was the portal of the largest "quartette" room on the floor—a tall figure kept guard. At first this figure was so

silent and motionless that it seemed like a shadow only. But when another shadow crept toward it, rustling along the wall on tiptoe, the guard demanded, hissingly:

"S-s-stop! who goes there?"

"Oh-oo! How you startled me, Madge Steele!"

"Sh!" commanded the guard. "Who goes there?"

"Why—why—— It's *I*."

"Give the password instantly. Answer!" commanded the guard again, and with some vexation. "'I' isn't anybody."

"Oh, indeed? Let me tell you that *this* 'I' is somebody—according to the gym. scales. I gained three pounds over the Easter holidays," said "Heavy" Jennie Stone, who had begun her reply with a giggle, but ended it with a sigh.

"Password, Miss!" snapped the guard, grimly.

"Oh! of course!" Then the fat girl whispered shrilly: "'Sincerity—befriend.' That is what 'S. B.' stands for, I s'pose. Sweetbriars! and I have a big bag of sour pickles to offset the cloying sweetness of the Sweetbriars," chuckled Heavy. "Besides, they say that vinegar pickles will make you thin——"

"I don't need them for that purpose," admitted the guard at the door, still in a whisper,

but accepting the large, "warty" pickle Heavy thrust into her hand.

"Will make *me* thin, then," agreed the other. "Let me in, Madge."

The guard, sucking the pickle convulsively the while, opened the door just a little way. A blanket had been hung on a frame inside in such a manner that scarcely a gleam of lamplight reached the corridor when the door was open.

"Pass the Sweetbriar!" choked Madge, with her mouth full and the tears running down her cheeks. "My goodness, Jennie Stone! these pickles are right out of vitriol!"

"Sour, aren't they?" chuckled Heavy. "I handed you a real one for fair, that time, didn't I, Madge?"

Then she tried to sidle through the narrow opening, got stuck, and was urged on by Madge pushing her. With a bang—punctuated by a chorus of muffled exclamations from the girls already assembled—she tore away the frame and the blanket and got through.

"Shut the door, quick, guard!" exclaimed Helen Cameron.

"Of course, that would be Heavy—entering like a female Samson and tearing down the pillars of the temple," snapped Mercy Curtis, the lame girl, in her sharp way.

"Please repair the damage, Helen," said Ruth

Fielding, who presided at the far end of the room, sitting cross-legged on one of the beds.

The other girls were arranged on the chairs, or upon the floor before her. There was a goodly number of them, and they now included most of the members of the secret society known at Briarwood Hall as the "S. B.'s."

Ruth herself was a bright, brown-haired girl who, without possessing many pretensions to real beauty of feature, still was quite good to look at and proved particularly charming when one grew to know her well.

She was rather plump, happy of disposition, and with the kindest heart in the world. She made both friends and enemies. No person of real character can escape being disliked, now and then, by those of envious disposition.

Ruth Fielding succeeded, usually, in winning to her those who at first disliked her. And this, I claim, is a better gift than that of being universally popular from the start.

Ruth had come from her old home in Darrowtown, where her parents died, two years before, to the Red Mill on the Lumano River, where her great-uncle, Jabez Potter, the miller, was inclined at first to shelter her only as an object of his grudging charity. In the first volume of this series, however, entitled "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill; Or, Jasper Parloe's Secret," the girl

found her way—in a measure, at least—to the uncle's crabbed heart.

Uncle Jabez was a just man, and he considered it his duty, when Helen Cameron, Ruth's dearest friend, was sent to Briarwood Hall to school, to send Ruth to the same institution. In the second volume, "Ruth Fielding at Briarwood Hall; Or, Solving the Campus Mystery," was related the adventures, friendships, rivalries, and fun of Ruth's and Helen's first term at the old school.

In "Ruth Fielding at Snow Camp; Or, Lost in the Backwoods," was told the adventures of Ruth and her friends at the Camerons' winter camp during the Christmas holidays. At the end of the first year of school, they all went to the seaside, to experience many adventures in "Ruth Fielding at Lighthouse Point; Or, Nita, the Girl Castaway," the fourth volume of the series.

A part of that eventful summer was spent by Ruth and her chums in Montana, and the girl of the Red Mill was enabled to do old Uncle Jabez such a favor that he willingly agreed to pay her expenses at Briarwood Hall for another year. This is all told in "Ruth Fielding at Silver Ranch; Or, Schoolgirls Among the Cowboys."

The girls returned to Briarwood Hall and in the sixth volume of the series, entitled "Ruth Fielding on Cliff Island; Or, The Old Hunter's

Treasure Box," Ruth was privileged to help Jerry Sheming and his unfortunate old uncle in the recovery of their title to Cliff Island in Lake Tallahaska, while she and her friends had some thrilling and many funny adventures during the mid-winter vacation.

The second half of this school year was now old. The Easter recess was past and the girls were looking forward to the usual break-up in the middle of June. The hardest of the work for the year was over. Those girls who had been faithful in their studies prior to Easter could now take something of a breathing spell, and the S. B.'s were determined to initiate such candidates as had been on the waiting list for reception into the secrets of the most popular society in the school.

The shrouded door of the quartette room occupied by Ruth, Helen, Mercy, and Jane Ann Hicks, from Montana, was opened carefully again and again until the outer guard, Madge Steele, had admitted all the candidates and most of the members of the S. B. order who were expected.

Each girl was presented with at least half a big sour pickle from Heavy's store; but really, the pickles had nothing to do with the initiation of the neophytes.

There was a serious and helpful side to the society of the S. B.'s—as witness the password.

Ruth, who was the most active member of the institution, realized, however, that the girls were so full of fun that they must have some way of expressing themselves out of the ordinary. Perhaps she had asked Mademoiselle Picolet, the French teacher, whose room was in this dormitory, and Miss Scrimp, the matron, to overlook this present infraction of the rules, for it must be admitted that the retiring bell had rung half an hour before the gathering in this particular room.

"All here!" breathed Ruth, at last, and Madge was called in. The candidates were placed in the middle of the floor. Ann Hicks, the girl from Silver Ranch, was one of these. Ann had proved her character and made herself popular in the school against considerable odds, as related in the preceding volume. Now, the honor of being admitted into the secret society was added to the other marks of the school's approval.

"Candidates," said Ruth, addressing in most solemn tones the group of girls before her, "you are about to be initiated into the degree of the Marble Harp. As Infants, when you first entered the school, you were all made acquainted with the legend of the Marble Harp.

"The figure of *Harmony,* presiding over the fountain in the middle of the campus, was mod-

eled by the sculptor from the only daughter of the man who originally owned Briarwood Park before it became a school. Said sculptor and daughter—in the most approved fashion of the present day school of romanticist authors—ran away with each other, were married without the father's approval, and both are supposed to have died miserably in a studio-garret.

"The heart-broken father naturally left his cur-r-r-se upon the fountain, and it is said—mind you, this is hearsay," added Ruth, solemnly, "that whenever anything of moment is about to transpire at Briarwood Hall, or any calamity befall, the strings of the marble harp held in the hands of *Harmony,* are heard to twang.

"Of course, as has been pointed out before, the fact that the harp is in the shape of a *lyre,* must be considered, too, if one is to accept this legend. But, however, and nevertheless," pursued Ruth, "it has been decided that the candidates here assembled must join in the Mackintosh March, and, in procession, led by our Outer Guard and followed—not to say *herded*—by our Rear Guard, must proceed once around the campus, down into the garden, and circle the fountain, chanting, as you have been instructed, the marching song.

"All ready! You all have your mackintoshes, as instructed? Into them at once," commanded

Ruth. "Into line—one after the other. Now, Outer Guard!"

The lights were extinguished; the blanket at the door was removed; Madge Steele led the way and Heavy, as the Rear Guard, was last in the line. Shrouded in the hoods of the mackintoshes, scarcely one of the girls would have been recognized by any curious teacher or matron.

Ruth hopped down from the bed, and the remaining Sweetbriars ran giggling to the windows. It was a drizzly, dark night. The paths about the campus glistened, and the lamps upon the posts flickered dimly.

Out of the front door filed the procession; when they were far enough away from the buildings which surrounded the campus, they began the chant, based upon Tom Moore's famous old song:

"The harp that once through Briarwood Hall
The soul of music shed,
Now hangs as mute o'er the campus fount
As though that soul were dead."

Madge Steele, with her strong voice, led the chant. The girls, crowded at the open windows, began to giggle, for they could hear Heavy, at the end of the procession, sing out a very different verse.

"That rascal ought to be fined for that," murmured The Fox, the sandy-haired girl next to Ruth.

"But, isn't she funny?" gasped Helen, on the other side of the Chief of the S. B.'s.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Belle Tingley. "I hope Sarah Fish got there ahead of them. *Won't* they be surprised when they get a baptism of a glass of water each from the fountain, as they go by?"

"They'll think the statue has come to life, sure enough, if it doesn't twang the lyre," quoth Helen.

"They'll get an unexpected ducking," giggled Lluella Fairfax.

"It won't hurt them," Ruth said, placidly. "That's why I insisted upon the mackintoshes."

"It's just as dark down there by the fountain as it can be," spoke Helen, with a little shiver. "D'you remember, Ruthie, how they hazed us there when we were Infants?"

"Don't I!" agreed her chum.

"If Sarah is careful, she can stand right up there against the statue and never be seen, while she can reach the water to throw it at the girls easily. There!" cried Belle. "They're turning down the walk to the steps. I can see them."

They all could see them—dimly. Like shadows the procession descended to the marble fountain, still chanting softly the refrain of the march-

ing song. Suddenly a shriek—a very vigorous and startling sound—rang out across the campus.

"It's begun!" giggled Belle.

But the sound was repeated—then in a thrilling chorus. Ruth was startled. She exclaimed:

"That wasn't either of the candidates. It was Sarah who screamed. There! It is Sarah again. Something has happened!"

Something certainly had happened. There had been an unexpected fault somewhere in the initiation. The procession burst like a bombshell, and the girls scattered through the wet campus, utterly terrified, and screaming as they ran.

CHAPTER II

THE WILD GIRL

"SOMETHING awful must have occurred!" cried Helen Cameron.

Ruth did not remain at the window for more than a moment after seeing the girls engaged in the initiation disperse, and hearing their screams. She drew back from the crowding group and darted out of the room. Fortunately neither the French teacher, nor the matron, had yet been aroused. If the girls came noisily into the dormitory building, Ruth knew very well that "the powers that be" must of necessity take cognizance of the infraction of the rules.

The girl from the Red Mill sped down the broad stairway and out of the house. Some of the fastest runners among the frightened girls were already panting at the steps.

"Hush! hush!" commanded Ruth. "What *is* the matter? What has happened?"

"Oh! it's the ghost!" declared one girl.

"So's your grandmother's aunt!" snapped another. "Somebody shoved Sarah into the water. It was no ghost."

It was Madge Steele who last spoke, and Ruth seized upon the senior, believing she might get something like a sensible explanation from her.

"You girls go into the house quietly," warned Ruth, as they scrambled up the stone steps. "Don't you *dare* make a noise and get us all into trouble."

Then she turned upon Madge, begging: "Do, *do* tell me what you mean, Madge Steele. *Who* pushed Sarah?"

"That's what I can't tell you. But I heard Sarah yelling that she was pushed, and she did most certainly fall right into the fountain when she climbed up there beside the statue."

"What a ridiculous thing!" giggled Ruth. "Somebody played a trick on her. I guess she was fooled instead of the candidates being startled, eh?"

"I saw somebody—or something—drop off the other side of the fountain and run—I saw it myself," declared Madge.

"Here comes Sarah," cried Ruth, under her breath. "And I declare she *is* all wet!"

Sarah Fish was actually laughing, but in a hysterical way.

"Oh, dear me! was ever anything so ridiculous before?" she gasped.

"Hush! Don't get Miss Picolet after us," begged Madge.

"What really happened?" demanded Ruth, eagerly.

"Why—I'll tell you," replied Sarah, whose gown clung to her as though it had been pasted upon her figure. "See? I'm just *soaked*. Talk about sprinkling those silly lambs of candidates! Why, *I* was immersed—you see."

"But how?"

"I slipped over there before the procession started from these steps. I was watching the girls, and listening to them sing, and didn't pay much attention to anything else.

"But when I dodged down into the little garden, I thought I heard a footstep on the flags. I looked all around, and saw nothing. Now I know the person must have already climbed up on the fountain and gotten into the shadow of the statue—just as I wanted to do."

"Was there really somebody there?" demanded Madge.

"How do you think I got into the fountain, if not?" snapped Sarah Fish.

"Fell in."

"I did not!" cried Sarah. "I was pushed."

"'Did She Fall, or Was She Pushed?'" giggled Madge. "Sounds like a moving picture title."

"You can laugh," scoffed Sarah. "I wonder what you'd have done?"

"Got just as wet as you did, most likely," said Ruth, calming the troubled waters. "Do go on, Sarah. So you really *saw* somebody?"

"And felt somebody. When I climbed up to get a footing beside the sitting figure, so that the girls would not see me, somebody shoved me—with both hands—right into the fountain."

"That's when you squalled?" asked Madge.

"Yes, indeed! And I rolled out of the fountain just as the—the person who pushed me, tumbled down off the pedestal and ran."

"For pity's sake!" ejaculated Ruth. "Do tell us who it was, Sarah."

"Don't you think I would if I could?" responded Sarah, trying to wring the water out of her narrow skirt.

Through the gloom appeared another figure—the too, too solid figure of Jennie Stone.

"Oh—dear—me! Oh—dear—me!" she panted. And then seeing Sarah Fish dripping there on the walk, Heavy fell upon the steps and giggled. "Oh, Sarah!" she gasped. "For once, your appearance fits your name, all right. You look like a fish out of its element."

"Laugh——"

"I have to," responded Heavy.

"Well, if it were you——"

"I know. I'd be floundering there in the water yet."

"But tell me!" cried Ruth, under her breath. "Was it a girl who pushed you into the fountain, Sarah?"

"It wore skirts—I'm sure of that, at least," grumbled Sarah.

"But it ran faster than any girl I ever saw run," vouchsafed Heavy. "*Did* you see her just skimming across the campus toward the main building? Like the wind!"

"It must be one of our girls," declared Madge.

"All right," said Heavy. "But if so, it's a girl I never saw run before. You can't tell me."

"You had better go in and get off your clothes, Sarah," advised Ruth. Then she looked at Madge. Madge was one of the oldest girls at Briarwood. "Let's go and see if we can find the girl," Ruth suggested.

"I'm game," cried Madge, as the other stragglers mounted the steps and disappeared behind the dormitory building door.

Both girls hurried down the walk under the trees to the main building. In one end of this Mrs. Tellingham and the Doctor had their abode. In the other end was the dining-room, with the kitchens and other offices in the basement. Besides, Tony Foyle, who was chief man-of-all-work about the Hall, and his wife, who was cook,

had their living rooms in the basement of this building.

Ruth and Madge hoped to investigate the matter of the mysterious marauder without arousing the little old Irishman, but already they saw his lantern behind the grated window in the front basement, and, as the two girls came nearer, they heard him grumblingly unchain the door.

"Bad 'cess to 'em! I seen 'em cavortin' across the campus, I tell ye, Mary Ann! There's wan of thim down here in the airy——"

It was evident that the old couple had been aroused, and that Tony was talking to his wife, who remained in the bedchamber. Ruth seized Madge's wrist and whispered in her ear:

"You run around one way, and I'll go the other. There must be *somebody* about, for Tony saw her——"

"If it *is* a girl."

"Both Sarah and Heavy say it is. I'm not afraid," declared Ruth, and she started off alone at once.

Madge disappeared around the corner. Ruth had darted into the heavily shaded space between the end of the main building and the next brick structure. There were no lights here, but there was a gas lamp on a post beyond the far corner, and before she was half way to it, she saw a shadow flit across the illuminated space about

this post, and disappear behind a clump of snowball bushes.

Ruth ran swiftly forward, dodged around the other end of the clump of thick bushes, and suddenly collided with somebody who uttered a muffled scream. Ruth grabbed the girl by both shoulders and held on.

It was like trying to hold a wild-cat. The girl, who was considerably smaller, and far slighter than Ruth, struggled madly to escape. She did not say a word at first, only straining to get away from Ruth's strong grip.

"Now stop! now wait!" panted Ruth. "I want to know who you are——"

The other tugged her best, but the girl of the Red Mill was very strong for her age, and she held on.

"Stop!" panted Ruth again. "If you make a noise, you'll bring old Tony here—and then you *will* be in trouble. I want to know who you are and what you were doing down there at the fountain—and why you pushed Sarah into the water?"

"And I'd like to push *you* in!" ejaculated the other girl, suddenly. "You let go of me, or I'll scratch you!"

"You can't," replied Ruth, firmly. "I'm holding you too tight."

"Then I'll bite you!" vowed the other.

"Why—you're a regular wild girl," exclaimed

Ruth. "You stop struggling, or I'll shout for help, and then Tony will come running."

"D—don't give me away," gasped the strange girl, suddenly ceasing her struggles.

"Do you belong here?" demanded Ruth.

"Belong here? Naw! I don't belong nowheres. An' you better lemme go, Miss."

"Why—you *are* a strange girl," said Ruth, greatly amazed. "You can't be one of us Briarwoods."

"That ain't my name a-tall," whispered the frightened girl. "My name's Raby."

"But what were you doing over there at the fountain?"

"Gettin' a drink. Was *that* any harm?" demanded the girl, sharply. "I'd found some dry pieces of bread the cook had put on top of a box there by the back door. I reckoned she didn't want the bread, and *I* did."

"Oh, dear me!" whispered Ruth.

"And dry bread's dry eatin'," said the strange girl. "I had ter have a drink o' water to wash it down. And jest as I got down into that little place where I seed the fountain this afternoon——"

"Oh, my, dear!" gasped Ruth. "Have you been lurking about the school all that time and never came and asked good old Mary Ann for something decent to eat?"

"Huh! mebbe she'd a drove me off. Or mebbe she'd done worse to me," said the other, quickly. "They beat me again day 'fore yesterday——"

"Who beat you?" demanded Ruth.

"Them Perkinses. Now! don't you go for to tell I said that. I don't want to go back to 'em—and their house ain't such a fur ways from here. If that cook—or any other grown folk—seen me, they'd want to send me back. I know 'em!" eclaimed the girl, bitterly. "But mebbe you'll be decent about it, and keep your mouth shut."

"Oh! I won't tell a soul," murmured Ruth. "But I'm so sorry. Only dry bread and water—"

"Huh! it'll keep a feller alive," said this strangely spoken girl. "I ain't no softie. Now, you lemme go, will yer? My! but you *are* strong."

"I'll let you go. But I do want to help you. I want to know more about you—*all* about you. But if Tony comes——"

"That's his lantern. I see it. He's a-comin'," gasped the other, trying to wriggle free.

"Where will you stay to-night?" asked Ruth, anxiously.

"I gotter place. It's warm and dry. I stayed there las' night. Come! you lemme go."

"But I want to help you——"

"'Twon't help me none to git me cotched."

"Oh, I know it! Wait! Meet me somewhere near here to-morrow morning—will you? I'll bring some money with me. I'll help you."

"Say! ain't you foolin'?" demanded the other, seemingly startled by the fact that Ruth wished to help her.

"No. I speak the truth. I will help you."

"Then I'll meet you—but you won't tell nobody?"

"Not a soul?"

"Cross yer heart?"

"I don't do such foolish things," said Ruth. "If I say I'll do a thing, I will do it."

"All right. What time'll I see you?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Aw-right," agreed the strange girl. "I'll be across the road from that path that's bordered by them cedar trees——"

"The Cedar Walk?"

"Guess so."

"I shall be there. And will you?"

"Huh! I kin keep my word as well as you kin," said the girl, sharply. Then she suddenly broke away from Ruth and ran. Tony Foyle came blundering around the corner of the house and Ruth, much excited, slipped away from the brush clump and ran as fast as she could to meet Madge Steele.

"Oh! is that you, Ruth?" exclaimed the senior,

when Ruth ran into her arms. "Tony's out. We had better go back to bed, or he'll report us to Mrs. Tellingham in the morning. I don't know where the strange girl could have gone."

Ruth did not say a word. Madge did not ask her, and the girl of the Red Mill allowed her friend to think that her own search had been quite as unsuccessful. But, as Ruth looked at it, it was not *her* secret.

CHAPTER III

SADIE RABY'S STORY

RUTH did not sleep at all well that night. Luckily, Helen had nothing on *her* mind or conscience, or she must have been disturbed by Ruth's tossing and wakefulness. The other two girls in the big quartette room—Mercy Curtis and Ann Hicks—were likewise unaware of Ruth's restlessness.

The girl of the Red Mill felt that she could take nobody into her confidence regarding the strange girl who said her name was Raby. Perhaps Ruth had no right to aid the girl if she was a runaway; yet there must be some very strong reason for making a girl prefer practical starvation to the shelter of "them Perkinses."

Bread and water! The thought of the child being so hungry that she had eaten discarded, dry bread, washed down with water from the fountain in the campus, brought tears to Ruth's eyes.

"Oh! I wish I knew what was best to do for her," thought Ruth. "Should I tell Mrs.

Tellingham? Or, mightn't I get some of the girls interested in her? Dear Helen has plenty of money, and she is just as tender-hearted as she can be."

Yet Ruth had given her promise to take nobody into her confidence about the half-wild girl; and, with Ruth Fielding, "a promise was a promise!"

In the morning, there was soon a buzz of excitement all over the school regarding the strange happening at the fountain on the campus. One girl whispered it to another, and the tale spread like wildfire. However, the teachers and the principal did not hear of the affair.

Ruth's lips, she decided, were sealed for the present regarding the mysterious girl who had pushed Sarah Fish into what Heavy declared was "her proper element." The wildest and most improbable stories and suspicions were circulated before assembly hour, regarding the Unknown.

There was so much said, and so many questions asked, in the quartette room where Ruth was located, that she felt like running away herself. But at mail time Madge Steele burst into the dormitory "charged to the muzzle," as The Fox expressed it, with a new topic of conversation.

"What do you think, girls? Oh! what do you think?" she cried. "We're going to live at Sunrise Farm."

"Ha! you ask us a question and answer it in the same breath," said Mercy, with a snap. "Now you've spilled the beans and we don't care anything about it at all."

"You *do* care," declared Madge. "I ask you first of all, Mercy. I invite every one of you for the last week in June and the first two weeks of July at Sunrise Farm——"

"Oh, wait!" exclaimed Mary Cox, otherwise "The Fox." "Do begin at the beginning. I, for one, never heard of Sunrise Farm before."

"I—I believe *I* have," said Ruth slowly. "But I don't suppose it can be the same farm Madge means. It is a big stock farm and it's not many miles from Dairowtown where I—I used to live once. *That* farm belonged to a family named Benson——"

"And a family named Steele owns it now," put in Madge, promptly. "It's the very same farm. It's a big place—five hundred acres. It's on a big, flat-topped hill. Father has been negotiating for the other farms around about, and has gotten options on most of them, too. He's been doing it very quietly.

"Now he says that the old house on the main farm is in good enough shape for us to live there this summer, while he builds a bigger house. And you shall all come with us—all you eight girls—the Brilliant Octette of Brairwood Hall.

"And Bob will get Helen's brother, and Busy Izzy; and Belle shall invite her brothers if she likes, and——"

"Say! are you figuring on having a standing army there?" demanded Mercy.

"That's all right. There is room. The old garret has been made over into two great dormitories——"

"And you've been keeping all this to yourself, Madge Steele?" cried Helen. "What a nice girl you are. It sounds lovely."

"And your mother and father will wish we had never arrived, after we've been there two days," declared Heavy. "By the way, do they know I eat three square meals each day?"

"Yes. And that if you are hungry, you get up in your sleep and find the pantry," giggled The Fox.

"Might as well have all the important details understood right at the start," said Heavy, firmly.

"If you'll all say you'll come," said Madge, smiling broadly, "we'll just have the lov-li-est time!"

"But we'll have to write home for permission," Lluella Fairfax ventured.

"Of course we shall," chimed in Helen.

"Then do so at once," commanded the senior. "You see, this will be my graduation party. No more Briarwood for me after this June, and I

don't know what I shall do when I go to Poughkeepsie next fall and leave all you "Infants" behind here——"

"*Infants!* Listen to her!" shouted Belle Tingley. "Get out of here!" and under a shower of sofa pillows Madge Steele had to retire from the room.

Ruth slipped away easily after that, for the other girls were gabbling so fast over the invitation for the early summer vacation, that they did not notice her departure.

This was the hour she had promised to meet the strange girl in whom she had taken such a great interest the night before—it was between the two morning recitation hours.

She ran down past the end of the dormitory building into the head of the long serpentine path, known as the Cedar Walk. The lines of closely growing cedars sheltered her from observation from any of the girls' windows.

The great bell in the clock tower boomed out ten strokes as Ruth reached the muddy road at the end of the walk. Nobody was in sight. Ruth looked up and down. Then she walked a little way in both directions to see if the girl she had come to meet was approaching.

"I—I am afraid she isn't going to keep her word," thought Ruth. "And yet—somehow—she seemed so frank and honest——"

She heard a shrill, but low whistle, and the sound made her start and turn. She faced a thicket of scrubby bushes across the road. Suddenly she saw a face appear from behind this screen—a girl's face.

"Oh! Is it you?" cried Ruth, starting in that direction.

"Cheese it! don't yell it out. Somebody'll hear you," said the girl, hoarsely.

"Oh, dear me! you have a dreadful cold," urged Ruth, darting around the clump of brush and coming face to face with the strange girl.

"Oh, *that* don't give me so much worry," said the Raby girl. "Aw—My goodness! Is that for *me?*"

Ruth had unfolded a paper covered parcel she carried. There were sandwiches, two apples, a piece of cake, and half a box of chocolate candies. Ruth had obtained these supplies with some difficulty.

"I didn't suppose you would have any breakfast," said Ruth, softly. "You sit right down on that dry log and eat. Don't mind me. I—I was awake most all night worrying about you being out here, hungry and alone."

The girl had begun to eat ravenously, and now, with her mouth full, she gazed up at her new friend's face with a suddenness that made Ruth pause.

"Say!" said the girl, with difficulty. "You're all right. I seen you come down the path alone, but reckoned I'd better wait and see if you didn't have somebody follerin' on behind. Ye might have give me away."

"Why! I told you I would tell nobody."

"Aw, yes—I know. Mebbe I'd oughter have believed ye; but I dunno. Lots of folks has fooled me. Them Perkinses was as soft as butter when they came to take me away from the orphanage. But now they treat me as mean as dirt—yes, they do!"

"Oh, dear me! So you haven't any mother or father?"

"Not a one," confessed the other. "Didn't I tell you I was took from an orphanage? Willie and Dickie was taken away by other folks. I wisht somebody would ha' taken us all three together; but I'm mighty glad them Perkinses didn't git the kids."

She sighed with present contentment, and wiped her fingers on her skirt. For some moments Ruth had remained silent, listening to her. Now she had for the first time the opportunity of examining the strange girl.

It had been too dark for her to see much of her the night before. Now the light of day revealed a very unkempt and not at all attractive figure. She might have been twelve—possibly

fourteen. She was slight for her age, but she might be stronger than she appeared to Ruth. Certainly she was vigorous enough.

She had black hair which was in a dreadful tangle. Her complexion was naturally dark, and she had a deep layer of tan, and over that quite a thick layer of dirt. Her hands and wrists were stained and dirty, too.

She wore no hat, raw as the weather was. Her ragged dress was an old faded gingham; over it she wore a three-quarter length coat of some indeterminate, shoddy material, much soiled, and shapeless as a mealsack. Her shoes and stockings were in keeping with the rest of her outfit.

Altogether her appearance touched Ruth Fielding deeply. This Raby girl was an orphan. Ruth remembered keenly the time when the loss of her own parents was still a fresh wound. Supposing no kind friends had been raised up for her? Suppose there had been no Red Mill for her to go to? She might have been much the same sort of castaway as this.

"Tell me who you are—tell me all about yourself—do!" begged the girl of the Red Mill, sitting down beside the other on the log. "I am an orphan as well as you, my dear. Really, I am."

"Was you in the orphanage?" demanded the Raby girl, quickly.

"Oh, no. I had friends——"

"You warn't never a reg'lar orphan, then," was the sharp response.

"Tell me about it," urged Ruth.

"Me an' the kids was taken to the orphanage just as soon as Mom died," said the girl, in quite a matter-of-fact manner. "Pa died two months before. It was sudden. But Mom had been sickly for a long time—I can remember. I was six."

"And how old are you now?" asked Ruth.

"Twelve and a half. They puts us out to work at twelve anyhow, so them Perkinses got me," explained the child. "I was pretty sharp and foxy when we went to the orphanage. The kids was only two and a half——"

"Both of them?" cried Ruth.

"Yep. They're twins, Willie and Dickie is. An' awful smart—an' pretty before they lopped off their curls at the orphanage. I was glad Mom was dead then," said the girl, nodding. "She'd been heart-broke to see 'em at first without their long curls.

"I dunno now—not rightly—just what's become of 'em," went on the girl. "Mebbe they come back to the orphanage. The folks that took 'em was nice enough, I guess, but the man thought two boys would be too much for his wife to take care of. She was a weakly lookin' critter.

"But the matron always said they shouldn't

go away for keeps, unless they went together. My goodness me! they'd never be happy apart," said the strange girl, wagging her head confidentially. "And they're only nine now. There's three years yet for the matron to find them a good home. Ye see, folks take young orphans on trial. I wisht them Perkinses had taken *me* on trial and then had sent me back. Or, I wisht they'd let the orphans take folks on trial instead of the other way 'round."

"Oh, it must be very hard!" murmured Ruth. "And you and your little brothers had to be separated?'

"Yep. And Willie and Dickie liked their sister Sade a heap," and the girl suddenly "knuckled" her eyes with her dirty hand to wipe away the tears. "Huh! I'm a big baby, ain't I? Well! that's how it is.

"And you really have run away from the people that took you from the orphanage, Sadie?"

"Betcher! So would you. Mis' Perkins is awful cross, an' he's crosser! I got enough——"

"Wouldn't they take you back at the orphanage?"

"Nope. No runaways there. I've seen other girls come back and they made 'em go right away again with the same folks. You see, there's a Board, or sumpin'; an' the Board finds out all about the folks that take away the orphans in the

first place. Then they won't never own up that they was fooled, that Board won't. They allus say it's the kids' fault if they ain't suited."

Suddenly the girl jumped up and peered through the bushes. Ruth had heard the thumping of horses' hoofs on the wet road.

"My goodness!" gasped Sadie Raby. "Here's ol' Perkins hisself. He's come clean over this road to look for me. Don't you tell him——"

She seized Ruth's wrist with her claw-like little hand.

"Don't you be afraid," said Ruth. "And take this." She thrust a closely-folded dollar bill into the girl's grimy fingers. "I wish it was more. I'll come here again to-morrow——"

The other had darted into the woods ere she had ceased speaking. Somebody shouted "Whoa!" in a very harsh voice, and then a heavy pair of cowhide boots landed solidly in the road.

"I see ye, ye little witch!" exclaimed the harsh voice. "Come out o' there before I tan ye with this whip!" and the whip in question snapped viciously as the speaker pounded violently through the clump of bushes, right upon the startled Ruth.

CHAPTER IV

"THEM PERKINSES"

IT was a fact that Ruth crouched back behind the log, fearful of the wrathful farmer. He was a big, coarse, high-booted, red-faced man, and he swung and snapped the blacksnake whip he carried as though he really intended using the cruel instrument upon the tender body of the girl, whose figure he had evidently seen dimly through the bushes.

"Come out 'o that!" he bawled, striding toward the log, and making the whip-lash whistle once more in the air.

Ruth leaped up, screaming with fear. "Don't you touch me, sir! Don't you dare!" she cried, and ran around the bushes out in to the road.

The blundering farmer followed her, still snapping the whip. Perhaps he had been drinking; at least, it was certain he was too angry to see the girl very well until they were both in the road.

Then he halted, and added:

"I'll be whipsawed if that's the gal!"

"I am *not* the girl—not the girl you want—

poor thing!" gasped Ruth. "Oh! you are horrid—terrible——"

"Shut up, ye little fool!" exclaimed the man, harshly. "You know where Sade is, then, I'll be bound.'

"How do you know——?"

"Ha! ye jest the same as told me," he returned, grinning suddenly and again snapping the whip. "You can tell me where that runaway's gone."

"I don't know. Even if I did, I would not tell you, sir," declared Ruth, recovering some of her natural courage now.

"Don't ye sass me—nor don't ye lie to me," and this time he swung the cruel whip, until the long lash whipped around her skirts about at a level with her knees. It did not hurt her, but Ruth cringed and shrieked aloud again.

"Stop yer howling!" commanded Perkins. "Tell me about Sade Raby. Where's she gone?"

"I don't know."

"Warn't she right there in them bushes with you?"

"I shan't tell you anything more," declared Ruth.

"Ye won't?"

The brute swung the blacksnake—this time in earnest. It cracked, and then the snapper laid along the girl's forearm as though it were seared with a hot iron.

Ruth shrieked again. The pain was more than she could bear in silence. She turned to flee up the Cedar Walk, but Perkins shouted at her to stand.

"You try ter run, my beauty, and I'll cut ye worse than that," he promised. "You tell me about Sade Raby."

Suddenly there came a hail, and Ruth turned in hope of assistance. Old Dolliver's stage came tearing along the road, his bony horses at a hand-gallop. The old man, whom the girls of Briarwood Hall called "Uncle Noah," brought his horses—and the Ark—to a sudden halt.

"What yer doin' to that gal, Sim Perkins?" the old man demanded.

"What's that to you, Dolliver?"

"You'll find out mighty quick. Git out o' here or you'll git into trouble. Did he hurt you, Miss Ruth?"

"No-o—not much," stammered Ruth, who desired nothing so much as to get way from the awful Mr. Perkins. Poor Sadie Raby! No wonder she had been forced to run away from "them Perkinses."

"I'll see you jailed yet, Sim, for some of your meanness," said the old stage driver. "And you'll git there quick if you bother Mis' Tellingham's gals——"

"I didn't know she was one 'o them tony school

gals," growled Perkins, getting aboard his wagon again.

"Well, she is—an' one 'o the best of the lot," said Dolliver, and he smiled comfortably at Ruth.

"Huh! whad-she wanter be in comp'ny of that brat 'o mine, then?" demanded Perkins, gathering up his reins.

"Oh! are you hunting that orphange gal ye took to raise? I heard she couldn't stand you and Ma Perkins no longer," Dolliver said, with sarcasm.

"Never you mind. I'll git her," said Perkins, and whipped up his horses.

"Oh, dear, me!" cried Ruth, when he had gone. "What a terrible man, Mr. Dolliver."

"Yah!" scoffed the old driver. "Jest a bag of wind. Mean as can be, but a big coward. Meanes' folks around here, them Perkinses air."

"But why were they allowed to have that poor girl, then?" demanded Ruth.

"They went a-fur off to git her. Clean to Harburg. Nobody knowed 'em there, I s'pose. Why, Ma Perkins kin act like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, if she wants to. But I sartainly am sorry for that poor little Sade Raby, as they call her."

"Oh! I do pity her so," said Ruth, sadly.

The old man's eyes twinkled. Old Dolliver

was sly! "Then ye *do* know suthin' about Sade —jes' as Perkins said?"

"She was here just now. I gave her something to eat—and a little money. You won't tell, Mr. Dolliver?"

"Huh! No. But dunno's ye'd oughter helped a runaway. That's ag'in the law, ye see."

"Would the law give that poor girl back to those ugly people?"

"I s'pect so," said Dolliver, scratching his head. "Ye see, Sim Perkins an' his wife air folks ye can't really go agin'—not *much*. Sim owns a good farm, an' pays his taxes, an' ain't a bad neighbor. But they've had trouble before naow with orphans. But before, 'twas boys."

"I just hope they all ran away!" cried Ruth, with emphasis.

"Wal—they did, by golly!" ejaculated the stage driver, preparing to drive on.

"And if you see this poor girl, you won't tell anybody, will you, Mr. Dolliver?" pleaded Ruth.

"I jes' sha'n't see her," said the man, his little eyes twinkling. "But you take my advice, Miss Fielding—don't *you* see her, nuther!"

Ruth ran back to the school then—it was time. She could not think of her lessons properly because of her pity for Sadie Raby. Suppose that horrid man should find the poor girl!

Every time Ruth saw the red welt on her arm,

where the whiplash had touched her, she wondered how many times Perkins had lashed Sadie when he was angry. It was a dreadful thought.

Although she had promised Sadie to keep her secret, Ruth wondered if she might not do the girl some good by telling Mrs. Tellingham about her. Ruth was not afraid of the dignified principal of Briarwood Hall—she knew too well Mrs. Grace Tellingham's good heart.

She determined at least that if Sadie appeared at the end of the Cedar Walk the next day she would try to get the runaway girl to go with her to the principal's office. Surely the girl should not run wild in the woods and live any way and how she could—especially so early in the season, for there was still frost at night.

When Ruth ran down the long walk between the cedar trees the next forenoon at ten, there was nobody peering through the bushes where Sadie Raby had watched the day before. Ruth went up and down the road, into the woods a little way, too—and called, and called. No reply. Nothing answered but a chattering squirrel and a jay who seemed to object to any human being disturbing the usual tenor of the woods' life thereabout.

"Perhaps she'll come this afternoon," thought Ruth, and she hid the package of food she had brought, and went back to her classes.

In the afternoon she had no better luck. The runaway did not appear. The food had not been touched. Ruth left the packet, hoping sadly that the girl might find it.

The next morning she went again. She even got up an hour earlier than usual and slipped out ahead of the other girls. The food had been disturbed—oh, yes! But by a dog or some "varmint." Sadie had not been to the rendezvous.

Hoping against hope, Ruth Fielding tacked a note in an envelope to the log on which she and Sadie had sat side by side. That was all she could do, save to go each day for a time to see if the strange girl had found the note.

There came a rain and the letter was turned to pulp. Then Ruth Fielding gave up hope of ever seeing Sadie Raby again. Old Dolliver told her that the orphan had never returned to "them Perkinses." For this Ruth might be thankful, if for nothing more.

The busy days and weeks passed. All the girls of Ruth's clique were writing back and forth to their homes to arrange for the visit they expected to make to Madge Steele's summer home—Sunrise Farm. The senior was forever singing the praises of her father's new acquisition. Mr. Steele had closed contracts to buy several of the neighboring farms, so that, altogether, he hoped to have more than a thousand acres in his estate.

"And, don't you *dare* disappoint me, Ruthie Fielding," cried Madge, shaking her playfully. "We won't have any good time without you, and you haven't said you'd go yet!"

"But I can't say so until I know myself," Ruth told her. "Uncle Jabez——"

"That uncle of yours must be a regular ogre, just as Helen says."

"What does Mercy say about him?" asked Ruth, with a quiet smile. "Mercy knows him fully as well, and she has a sharp tongue."

"Humph! that's odd, too. She doesn't seem to think your Uncle Jabez is a very harsh man. She calls him 'Dusty Miller,' I know."

"Uncle Jabez has a prickly rind, I guess," said Ruth. "But the meat inside is sweet. Only he's old-fashioned and he can't get used to new-fashioned ways. He doesn't see any reason for my 'traipsing around' so much. I ought to be at the mill between schooltimes, helping Aunt Alvirah—so he says. And I am afraid he is right. I feel condemned——"

"You're too tender-hearted. Helen says he's as rich as can be and might hire a dozen girls to help 'Aunt Alviry'."

"He might, but he wouldn't," returned Ruth, smiling. "I can't tell you yet for sure that I can go to Sunrise Farm. I'd love to. I've always heard 'twas a beautiful place."

"And it is, indeed! It's going to be the finest gentleman's estate in that section, when father gets through with it. He's going to make it a great, big, paying farm—so he says. If it wasn't for that man Caslon, we'd own the whole hill all the way around, as well as the top of it."

"Who's that?" asked Ruth, surprised that Madge should speak so sharply about the unknown Caslon.

"Why, he owns one of the farms adjoining. Father's bought all the neighbors up but Caslon. *He* won't sell. But I reckon father will find a way to make him, before he gets through. Father usually carries his point," added Madge, with much pride in Mr. Steele's business acumen.

Uncle Jabez had not yet said Ruth could go with the crowd to the Steeles' summer home; Aunt Alvirah wrote that he was "studyin' about it." But there was so much to do at Briarwood as the end of the school year approached, that the girl of the Red Mill had little time to worry about the subject.

Although Ruth and Helen Cameron were far from graduation themselves, they both had parts of some prominence in the exercises which were to close the year at Briarwood Hall. Ruth was in a quartette selected from the Glee Club for some special music, and Helen had a small violin solo part in one of the orchestral numbers.

Not many of the juniors, unless they belonged to either the school orchestra or the Glee Club, would appear to much advantage at graduation. The upper senior class was in the limelight—and Madge Steele was the only one of Ruth's close friends who was to receive her diploma.

"We who aren't seniors have to sit around like bumps on a log," growled Heavy. "Might as well go home for good the day before."

"You should have learned to play, or sing, or something," advised one of the other girls, laughing at Heavy's apparently woebegone face.

"Did you ever hear me try to sing, Lluella?" demanded the plump young lady. "I like music myself—I'm very fond of it, no matter how it sounds! But I can't even stand my own chest-tones."

Preparations for the great day went on apace. There was to be a professional director for the augmented orchestra and he insisted, because of the acoustics of the hall, upon building an elevated extension to the stage, upon which to stand to conduct the music.

"Gee!" gasped Heavy, when she saw it the first time. "What's the diving-board for?"

"That's not a diving-board," snapped Mercy Curtis. "It's the lookout station for the captain to watch the high C's."

The bustle and confusion of departure punctu-

ated the final day of the term, too. There were *so* many girls to say good-bye to for the summer; and some, of course, would never come back to Briarwood Hall again—as scholars, at least.

In the midst of the excitement Ruth received a letter in the crabbed hand of dear old Aunt Alvirah. The old lady enclosed a small money order, fearing that Ruth might not have all the money she needed for her home-coming. But the best item in the letter beside the expression of Aunt Alvirah's love, was the statement that "Your Uncle Jabe, he's come round to agreeing you should go to that Sunrise Farm place with your young friends. I made him let me hire a tramping girl that came by, and we got the house all rid up, so when you come home, my pretty, all you got to do is to visit."

"And I *will* visit with her—the unselfish old dear!" Ruth told herself. "Dear me! how very, very good everybody is to me. But I am afraid poor Uncle Jabez wouldn't be so kind if he wasn't influenced by Aunt Alvirah."

CHAPTER V

"THE TRAMPING GAL"

THE old clock that had hung in the Red Mill kitchen from the time of Uncle Jabez Potter's grandfather—and that was early time on the Lumano, indeed!—hesitatingly tolled the hour of four.

Daybreak was just behind the eastern hills. A light mist swathed the silent current of the river. Here and there, along the water's edge, a tall tree seemed floating in the air, its bole and roots cut off by the drifting mist.

"Oh, it is very, very beautiful here!" sighed Ruth Fielding, kneeling at the open window and looking out upon the awakening world—as she had done many and many another early morning since first she was given this little gable-windowed room for her very own.

The sweet, clean, cool air breathed in upon her bare throat and shoulders, revealed through the lace trimming of her night robe. Ruth loved linen like other girls, and although Uncle Jabez gave her spending money with a rather niggardly

hand, she and Aunt Alvirah knew how to make the pennies "go a long way" in purchasing and making her gowns and undergarments.

There lay over a chair, too, a pretty, light blue, silk trimmed crepe-cloth kimona, with warm, fur-edged slippers to match, on the floor. The moment she heard Uncle Jabez rattle the stove-shaker in the kitchen, Ruth slipped into this robe, and thrust her bare feet into the slippers. Her braids she drew over her shoulders—one on either side—as she hurried out of the little chamber and down the back stairs.

She had arrived home from Briarwood the night before. For more than eight months she had seen neither Uncle Jabez nor Aunt Alvirah; and she had been so tired and sleepy on her arrival that she had quickly gone to bed. She felt as though she had scarcely greeted the two old people.

Uncle Jabez was bending over the kitchen stove. He always looked gray of face, and dusty. The mill-dust seemed ground into both his clothes and his complexion.

The first the old man knew of her presence, the arms of Ruth were around his neck.

"Ugh-huh?" questioned the old man, raising up stiffly as the fire began to chatter, the flames flashing under the lids, and turned to face the girl who held him so lovingly. "What's wanted,

Niece Ruth?" he added, looking at her grimly under his bristling brows.

Ruth was not afraid of his grimness. She had learned long since that Uncle Jabez was much softer under the surface than he appeared. He claimed to be only just to her; but Ruth knew that his "justice" often leaned toward the side of mercy.

Her mother, Mary Potter, had been the miller's favorite niece; when she had married Ruth's father, Uncle Jabez had been angry, and for years the family had been separated. But when Uncle Jabez had taken Ruth in "just out of charity," old Aunt Alvirah had assured the heartsick girl that the miller was kinder at heart than he wished people to suppose.

"He don't never let his right hand know what his left hand doeth," declared the loyal little old woman who had been so long housekeeper for the miller. "He saved me from the poorhouse—yes, he did!—jest to git all the work out o' me he could—to hear him tell it!

"But it ain't so," quoth Aunt Alvirah, shaking her head. "He saw a lone ol' woman turned out o' what she'd thought would be her home till she come to death's door. An' so he opened his house and his hand to her. An' he's opened his house and hand to *you,* my pretty; and who knows? mebbe 'twill open wide his heart, too."

Ruth had been hoping the old man's heart *was* open, not only to her, but to the whole world. She knew that, in secret, Uncle Jabez was helping to pay Mercy Curtis's tuition at Briarwood. He still loved money; he always would love it, in all probability. But he had learned to "loosen up," as Tom Cameron expressed it, in a most astonishing way. One could not honestly call Uncle Jabez a miser nowadays.

He was miserly in the outward expression of any affection, however. And that apparent coldness Ruth Fielding longed to break down.

Now the girl, all flushed from her deep sleep, and smiling, lifted her rosy lips to be kissed. "I didn't scarcely say 'how-do' to you last night, Uncle," she said. "Do tell me you're glad to see me back."

"Ha! Ye ain't minded to stay long, it seems."

"I won't go to Sunrise Farm if you want me here, Uncle Jabez," declared Ruth, still clinging to him, and with the same smiling light in her eyes.

"Ha! ye don't mean that," he grunted.

He knew she did. His wrinkled, hard old face finally began to change. His eyes tried to escape her gaze.

"I just *love* you, Uncle," she breathed, softly. "Won't—won't you let me?"

"There, there, child!" He tried for a mo-

ment to break her firm hold; then he stooped shamefacedly and touched her fresh lips with his own.

Ruth nestled against his big, strong body, and clung a moment longer. His rough hand smoothed her sleek head almost timidly.

"There, there!" he grumbled. "You're gittin' to be a big gal, I swow! And what good's so much schoolin' goin' ter do ye? Other gals like you air helpin' in their mothers' kitchens—or goin' to work in the mills at Cheslow. Seems like a wicked waste of time and money."

But he did not say it so harshly as had been his wont in the old times. Ruth smiled up at him again.

"Trust me, Uncle," she said. "The time'll come when I'll prove to you the worth of it. Give me the education I crave, and I'll support myself and pay you all back—with interest! You see if I don't."

"Well, well! It's new-fashioned, I s'pose," growled the old man, starting for the mill. "Gals, as well as boys, is lots more expense now than they used ter be to raise. The 'three R's' was enough for us when I was young.

"But I won't stop yer fun. I promised yer Aunt Alviry I wouldn't," he added, with his hand upon the door-latch. "You kin go to that Sunrise place for a while, if ye want. Yer Aunt

Alviry got a trampin' gal that came along, ter help her clean house."

"Oh! and isn't the girl here now?" asked Ruth, preparing to run back to dress."

"Nope. She's gone on. Couldn't keep her no longer. And my! how that young 'un could eat! Never saw the beat of her," added Uncle Jabez as he clumped out in his heavy boots.

Ruth heard more about "that trampin' girl" when Aunt Alvirah appeared. Before that happened, however, the newly returned schoolgirl proved she had not forgotten how to make a country breakfast.

The sliced corned ham was frying nicely; the potatoes were browning delightfully in another pan. Fluffy biscuit were ready to take out of the oven, and the cream was already whipped for the berries and the coffee.

"Gracious me! child alive!" exclaimed the little old woman, coming haltingly into the room. "You an' Jabez air in a conspiracy to spile me—right from the start. Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!" and she lowered herself carefully into a chair.

"I did sartain sure oversleep this day. Ben done the chores? An' ye air all ready, my pretty? Jest blow the horn, then, and yer uncle will come in. My! what a smart leetle housekeeper you be, Ruth. School ain't spiled ye a mite."

"Uncle is still afraid it will," laughed Ruth, kissing the old woman fondly.

"He only *says* that," whispered Aunt Alvirah, with twinkling eyes. "He's as proud of ye as he can stick—I know!"

"It—it would be nice, if he said so once in a while," admitted the girl.

After the hearty breakfast was disposed of and the miller and his hired man had tramped out again, the old housekeeper and Ruth became more confidential.

"It sartain sure did please me," said Aunt Alvirah, "when Jabez let me take in that trampin' gal for a week an' more. He paid her without a whimper, too. But, she *did* eat!"

"So he said," chuckled Ruth.

"Yes. More'n a hired hand in thrashin' time. I never seen her beat. But I reckon the poor little thing was plumb starved. They never feed 'em ha'f enough in them orphan 'sylums, I don't s'pect."

"From an orphanage?" cried Ruth, with sudden interest born of her remembrance of the mysterious Sadie Raby.

"So I believe. She'd run away, I s'pect. I hadn't the heart to blame her. An' she was close-mouthed as a clam," declared Aunt Alvirah.

"How did you come to get her?" queried the interested Ruth.

"She walked right up to the door. She'd been travelin' far—ye could see that by her shoes, if ye could call 'em shoes. I made her take 'em off by the fire, an' then I picked 'em up with the tongs—they was just pulp—and I pitched 'em onto the ash-heap.

"Well, she stayed that night, o' course. It was rainin'. Your Uncle Jabez wouldn't ha' turned a dog out in sech weather. But he made me put her to bed on chairs here.

It was plain she was delighted to have somebody to talk to—and as that somebody was "her pretty," the dear old soul was all the more joyful.

"So, one thing led to another," pursued Aunt Alvirah, "and I got him to let me keep her to help rid the house up. You know, you wrote me to wait till you come home for house-cleanin'. But I worked Jabez Potter *right;* I know how to manage him," said she, nodding and smiling.

"And you didn't know who the girl was?" asked Ruth, still curious. "Nothing about her at all?"

"Not much. She was short-tongued, I tell ye. But I gathered she had been an orphan a long time and had lived at an institution."

"Not even her name?" asked Ruth, at last.

"Oh, yes. She told her name—and it was her true one, I reckon," Aunt Alviry said. "It was Sadie Raby."

CHAPTER VI

SEEKING THE TRAIL

"I MIGHT have known that! I might have known it!" Ruth exclaimed when she heard this. "And if I'd only written you or Uncle Jabez about her, maybe you would have kept her till I came. I wanted to help that girl," and Ruth all but shed tears.

"Deary, deary me!" cried Aunt Alvirah. "Tell me all about it, my pretty."

So Ruth related all she knew about the half-wild girl whose acquaintance she had made at Briarwood Hall under such peculiar circumstances. And she told just how Sadie looked and all about her.

"Yes," agreed Aunt Alvirah. "That was the trampin' gal sure enough. She was honest, jest as you say. But your uncle had his doubts. However, she looked better when she went away from here."

"I'm glad of that," Ruth said, heartily.

"You know one o' them old dresses of yours you wore to Miss Cramp's school—the one Helen

give you?" said old Aunt Alvirah, hesitatingly.

"Yes, indeed!" said Ruth. "And how badly I felt when the girls found out they were 'hand-me-downs.' I'll never forget them."

"One of them I fitted to that poor child," said Aunt Alvirah. "The poor, skinny little thing. I wisht I could ha' kep' her long enough to put some flesh on her bones."

Ruth hugged the little old woman. "You're a dear, Aunty! I bet you fixed her up nice before she went away."

"Wal, she didn't look quite sech a tatterdemalian," granted Aunt Alvirah. "But I was sorry for her. I am allus sorry for any young thing that's strayin' about without a home or a mother. But natcherly Jabez wouldn't hear to keepin' her after the cleanin' was done. It's his *nearness,* Ruthie; he can't help it. Some men chew tobacco, and your Uncle Jabez is *close.* It's their nater. I'd ruther have a stingy man about, than a tobacco chewin' man—yes, indeed I had!"

Ruth laughed and agreed with her. Yet she was very sorry that Sadie Raby, "the tramping girl," had been allowed to move on without those at the Red Mill, who had sheltered her, discovering her destination.

She learned that Sadie had gone to Cheslow—at least, in that direction—and when Helen came

spinning along in one of her father's cars from Outlook that afternoon, and wanted to take Ruth for a drive, the latter begged to ride "Cheslowward."

"Besides, we both want to see Dr. Davison—and there's Mercy's mother. And Miss Cramp will be glad to see me, I know; we'll wait till her school is out," Ruth suggested.

"You're boss," declared her chum. "And paying calls 'all by our lonesomes' will be fun enough. Tom's deserted me. He's gone tramping with Reno over toward the Wilkins Corner road—you know, that place where he was hurt that time, and you and Reno found him," Helen concluded.

This was "harking back" to the very first night Ruth had arrived at Cheslow from her old home at Darrowtown. But she was not likely to forget it, for through that accident of Master Tom Cameron's, she had met this very dear friend beside her now in the automobile.

"Oh, dear me! and the fun we used to have when we were little girls—'member, Ruthie?" demanded Helen, laughing. "My! isn't it warm? Is my face shiny?"

"Just a little," admitted Ruth.

"Never can keep the shine off," said Helen, bitterly. "Here! you take the wheel and let me find my powder-paper. Tom says he believes I

smoke cigarettes and roll them myself," and Helen giggled.

Ruth carefully changed seats with her chum, who immediately produced the booklet of slips from her vanity case and rubbed the offending nose vigorously.

"Have a care, Helen! you'll make it all red," urged Ruth, laughing. "You *do* go at everything so excitedly. Anybody would think you were grating a nutmeg."

"Horrid thing! My nose doesn't look at all like a nutmeg."

"But it will—if you don't look out," laughed Ruth. "Oh, dear, me! here comes a big wagon. Do you suppose I can get by it safely?"

"If he gives you any room. There! he has begun to turn out. Now, just skim around him."

Ruth was careful and slowed down. This did not suit the fly-away Helen. "Come on!" she urged. "We'll never even get to the old doctor's house if you don't hurry."

She began to manipulate the levers herself and soon they were shooting along the Cheslow road at a speed that made Ruth's eyes water.

They came safely to the house with the green lamps before it, and ran in gaily to see their friend, Dr. Davison. For the moment the good old gentleman chanced to be busy and waved

them into the back office to wait until he was free.

Old Mammy, who presided over the doctor's old-fashioned establishment, had spied the girls and almost immediately the tinkling of ice in a pitcher announced the approach of one of Mammy's pickaninny grandchildren with a supply of her famous lemonade and a plate of cakes.

"Mammy said you done git hungery waitin'," declared the grinning, kinky-haired child who presented herself with the refreshments. "An' a drink on one o' dese yere dusty days is allus welcome, misses."

Then she giggled, and darted away to the lower regions of the house, leaving the two chums to enjoy the goodies. Helen was cheerfully curious, and had to go looking about the big office, peeking into the bookcases, looking at the "specimens" in bottles along the shelf, trying to spell out and understand the Latin labels on the jars of drugs.

"Miss Nosey!" whispered Ruth, admonishingly.

"There you go! hitting my nose again," sighed Helen. And then she jumped back and almost screamed. For in fooling with the knob of a narrow closet door, it had snapped open, the door swung outward, and Helen found herself facing an articulated skeleton!

"Goodness gracious me!" exclaimed Helen.

"Oh, no," giggled Ruth. "It's not you at all. It's somebody else."

"Funny!" scoffed Helen. Then she laughed, too. "It's somebody the doctor's awfully choice of. Do you suppose it was his first patient?"

"Hush! Suppose he heard you?"

"He'd laugh," returned Helen, knowing the kindly old physician too well to be afraid of him in any case. "Now, behave! Don't say a word. I'm going to dress him up."

"What?" gasped Ruth.

"You'll see," said the daring Helen, and she seized an old hat of the doctor's from the top of the bookcase and set it jauntily upon the grinning skull.

"My goodness! doesn't he look terrible that way? Oh! I'll shut the door. He wiggles all over—*just as though he were alive!*"

Just then they heard the doctor bidding his caller good-bye, or Helen might have done some other ridiculous thing. The old gentleman came in, rubbing his hands, and with his eyes twinkling. He was a man who had never really grown old, and he liked to hear the girls tell of their school experiences, chuckling over their scrapes and antics with much delight.

"And how has my Goody Two-sticks gotten along this year?" he asked, for he was much

interested in Mercy Curtis and her improvement, both physically and mentally. Had it not been for the doctor, Mercy might never have gotten out of her wheelchair, or gone to Briarwood Hall.

"She's going to beat us all," Helen declared, with enthusiasm. "Isn't she, Ruth?"

"She will if we don't work pretty hard," admitted the girl of the Red Mill, who was hoping herself to be finally among the first few members of her class at the Hall. "But I would rather see Mercy win first place, I believe, than anybody else—unless it is you, Helen."

"Don't you fret," laughed Helen. "You'll never see little me at the head of the class—and you know it."

The two friends did not bore the physician by staying too long, but after he bade them goodbye at the door, Helen ran down the path giggling.

"What do you suppose he'll say when he finds that hat on the skeleton?" she demanded, her eyes dancing.

"He'll say, 'That Helen Cameron was in here—that explains it!' You can't fool Dr. Davison," laughed Ruth.

Ruth had taken Helen into her confidence ere this about the strange runaway, Sadie Raby, and during their call at the doctor's, she had asked

that gentleman if he had seen the tramping girl, after the latter had left the Red Mill. But he had not. Oddly enough, however, Ruth found some trace of Sadie at Mercy's house, where the girls in the automobile next went to call.

Mercy's mother had taken the girl in for a night, and fed her. The latter had asked Mr. Curtis about the trains going west, but he had sold Sadie no ticket.

"She was very reticent," Mrs. Curtis told Ruth. "She was so independent and capable-acting, in spite of her tender years, that I did not feel as though it was my place to try to stop her. She seemed to have some destination in view, but she would not tell me what it was."

"I wonder if that wasn't what Aunt Alvirah meant?" queried Ruth, thoughtfully, as she and Helen drove away. "That Sadie is awfully independent. I wish you had seen her."

"Maybe she's going to find her twin brothers that she told you about," suggested Helen. "I wish I *had* seen her."

"And maybe you've guessed it!" cried Ruth. "But that doesn't help us find *her*, for she didn't say where Willie and Dickie had been taken when they were removed from the orphanage."

"Gracious, Ruthie!" exclaimed her chum, laughing. "You're always worrying over somebody else's troubles."

CHAPTER VII

WHAT TOM CAMERON SAW

Of course, Ruth was not at all sure that she could do anything for Sadie Raby if she found her. Perhaps, as Helen said, she was fond of shouldering other people's burdens.

It did seem to the girl of the Red Mill as though it were a very dreadful thing for Sadie to be wandering about the country all alone, and without means to feed herself, or get anything like proper shelter.

In her secret heart Ruth was thinking that *she* might have been as wild and neglected if Uncle Jabez, with all his crankiness, had not taken her in and given her a home at the Red Mill.

They stopped and saw Ruth's old school teacher and then, it being past mid-afternoon, Helen turned the headlights of the car toward home again. As the machine slid so smoothly along the road toward the Lumano and the Red Mill, Ruth suddenly uttered a cry and pointed ahead. A huge dog had leaped out of a side road and stood, barring their way and barking.

"Reno! dear old fellow!" Ruth said, as Helen shut off the power. "He knows us."

"Tom must be near, then. That's the Wilkins Corner road," Helen observed.

As the car came to a halt and the big mastiff tried to jump in and caress the girls with his tongue—poor fellow! he knew no better, though Helen scolded him—Ruth stood up and shouted for her friend's twin brother.

"Tom! Tom! A rescue! a rescue! We're being eaten up by a great four-legged beast—get down, Reno! Oh, don't!"

She fell back in her seat, laughing merrily, and keeping the big dog off with both hands. A cheery whistle came from the wood. Reno started and turned to look. He had had his master back for only a day, but Tom's word was always law to the big mastiff.

"Down, sir!" sang out Tom Cameron, and then he burst into view.

"Oh, Tom! what a sight you are!" gasped Ruth.

"My goodness me!" exclaimed his sister. "Have you been in a fight?"

"Down, Reno!" commanded her brother again. He came striding toward them. If he had not been so disheveled, anybody could have seen that, dressed in his sister's clothes, and she in his, one could scarcely have told them apart. A boy and a girl never could look more alike than Tom and Helen Cameron.

"What has happened to you?" demanded Ruth, quite as anxious as Tom's own sister.

"Look like I'd been monkeying with the buzz-saw—eh?" he demanded, but a little ruefully. "Say! I've had a time. If it hadn't been for Reno——"

"Why, Reno has hurt himself, too!" exclaimed Ruth, hopping out of the car and for the first time noticing that there was a cake of partially dried blood on the dog's shoulder.

"He isn't hurt much. And neither am I. Only my clothes torn——"

"And your face scratched!" ejaculated Helen.

"Oh—well—*that's* nothing. That was an accident. She didn't mean to do it."

"*Who* didn't mean to do it? What *are* you talking about?" screamed his sister, at last fully aroused. "You've been in some terrible danger, Tom Cameron."

"No, I haven't," returned Tom, beginning to grin again. "Just been playing the chivalrous knight."

"And got his face scratched!" tittered Ruth.

"Aw—well—— Now wait! let me tell you," he began.

"Now he's going to make excuses," cried Helen. "You have gotten into trouble, you reckless boy, and want to make light of it."

"Gee! I'd like to see *you* make light of it,"

exclaimed Tom, with some vexation. "If you can make head or tail of it—— And that girl!"

"There he goes again," said Ruth. "He has got to tell us. It is about a girl," and she laughed, teasingly.

"Say! I don't know which one of you is the worse," said Tom, ruefully. "Listen, will you?"

"Go ahead," said Helen, solemnly.

"Well, Reno and I were hiking along the Wilkins Corner road yonder. It was just about where your Uncle Jabe's wagon, Ruth, knocked me down into the gully that time—remember?"

Ruth nodded.

"Well, I heard somebody scream. It was a girl. Reno began to growl and I held him back till I located the trouble. There was a campfire down under that bank and the scream came from that direction.

"'Go to it, old boy!' I says, and let Reno go. I had no reason to believe there was real trouble," Tom said, wagging his head. "But I followed him down the bank just the same, for although Reno wouldn't bite anybody unless he had to, he does look ugly—to strangers.

"Well, what do you think? There were a couple of tramps at the fire, and Reno was holding them off from a girl. He showed his teeth all right, and one of them had his knife out. *He* was an ugly looking customer."

"My goodness! a girl?" gasped his sister. "What sort of a looking girl?"

"She wasn't bad looking," Tom said. "Younger than us—mebbe twelve, or so. But she'd been sleeping out in her clothes—you could see she had. And her face and hands were dirty.

"'What were they trying to do to you?' I asked her.

"'Trying to get my money,' says she. 'I ain't got much, but you bet I want that little.'

"'I guess you can keep it,' I said. 'But if I were you, I'd hike out of this.'

"'I'm going to,' says she. 'I'm going just as fast as I can to the railroad and jump a train. These fellers have been bothering me all day. I'm glad you came along. Thanks.'

"And with that she started to move off. But the tramps were real ugly, and one of them jumped for her. I tripped him up," said Tom, grinning again now in remembrance of the row, "and then there certainly *was* a fuss."

"Oh, Tom!" murmured Helen.

"Well, I had Reno, didn't I? The man I tripped fell into the fire, but was more scared than hurt. But the other fellow—the one with the knife—slashed at Reno, and cut him.

"Well! you never saw such a girl as that tramping girl was——"

"What's *that?*" gasped Ruth. "Oh, Helen!"

"It might be Sadie Raby—eh?" queried her chum.

"Hel-lo!" exclaimed Master Tom, turning curious. "What do you girls know about her? Sadie Raby—that's what she said her name was."

"My goodness me! What do you think of that?" cried his sister.

"And where is she now?" demanded Ruth.

"Aw, wait till I tell you all about it," complained Tom. "You girls take the wind all out of my sails."

"All right. Go ahead," begged his sister.

"So, that Sadie girl, she came back to my help, and when one of the fellows had me down, and Reno was holding the other by the wrist, she started to dig into the face of the rascal who held me. And once she scratched me by mistake," added Tom, laughing.

"But between us—mostly through Reno's help—we frightened them off. They hobbled away through the bushes. Then I took her to the railroad, and waited at the tank till a train came along and stopped."

"And put her aboard, Tom!" cried Ruth.

"Yes. It was a freight. I bribed the conductor with two dollars to let her ride as far as Campton. I knew those two tramps would never catch her there. Why! what's the matter?"

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Helen, with dis-

gust. "Doesn't it take a boy to spoil everything?"

"Why—what?" began Tom.

"And her name was Sadie Raby?" demanded Ruth.

"That's what she said."

"We just wanted to see her, that's all," said his sister. "Ruth did, anyway. And I'd have been glad to help her."

"Well, I helped her, didn't I?" demanded Tom, rather doggedly.

"Yes. Just like a boy. What do you suppose is to become of a girl like her traveling around the country?"

"She seemed to want to get to Campton real bad. I reckon she has folks there," said Tom, slowly.

"She's got no folks—if her story is true," said Ruth, quietly, "save two little brothers."

"And they're twins, like us, Tom," said Helen, eagerly. "Oh, dear! it's too bad Ruth and I didn't come across Sadie, instead of you."

Tom began to laugh at that. "You'd have had a fine time getting her away from those tramps," he scoffed. "She didn't have but a little money, and they would have stolen that from her if it hadn't been for Reno and me."

CHAPTER VIII

TRAVELING TOWARD SUNRISE FARM

TOM CAMERON thought a great deal of Ruth, and for that reason alone was sorry he had not stayed the departure of the runaway girl, Sadie Raby, from the vicinity of Cheslow. Then, as he thought of it more, and heard the girls talk about the tramping girl's circumstances as *they* knew them, Tom was even more disturbed.

He and Reno had gotten into the tonneau of the car, which rolled away toward the Red Mill at a slower pace. He leaned his arms on the back of the front seat and listened to Ruth's story of her meeting with Sadie Raby, and her experience with Sim Perkins, and of her surprise at finding that Sadie had worked for a while at the Red Mill.

"If we had only been a few days earlier in getting home from school, there she would have been," finished Ruth, with a sigh.

"That's so," agreed her chum. "And she even stayed night before last with Mercy's mother. My! but she's as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp."

"We could telegraph to Campton and have her stopped," suggested Tom.

"By the police?" demanded his sister.

"Oh! what for?" asked Ruth.

"There! nothing *I* suggest is any good," said the boy.

"Not unless you suggest something better than that," laughed Ruth. "The poor thing doesn't need to be arrested. And she might refuse any help we could give her. She's very independent."

"She sure is," admitted Tom, ruefully.

"And we don't know *why* she wanted to go to Campton," his sister remarked.

"Nor if she got there safely," added Ruth.

"Pshaw! if that's worrying you two, I'll find out for sure to-morrow," quoth Master Tom.

He knew the conductor of the freight train with whom he had entrusted the strange girl. The next day he went over to the tank at the right hour and met the conductor again.

"Sure, I got her on to Campton—poor kid," said the man. "She's a smart one, too. When the boys wanted to know who she was, I said she was my niece, and she nodded and agreed to it. We had a big feed back here in the hack while she was aboard, and she had her share."

"But where was she going?" asked Tom.

"Didn't get much out of her," admitted the conductor. "But she'd lived in Harburg, and I

reckon she had folks in or near Campton. But I'm not sure at all."

This was rather unsatisfactory; but whatever point the strange girl was journeying to, she had arrived safely at Campton. This Tom told Ruth and the latter had to be content with this information.

The incident of the runaway girl was two or three days old when Ruth received a letter from Madge Steele urging them all to come on soon—that Sunrise Farm was ready for them, and that she was writing all the girls to start on Monday.

The train would take them to Darrowtown. There a conveyance would meet and transport the visitors fifteen miles through the country to Mr. Steele's big estate.

Mercy Curtis joined the Camerons and Ruth at the Cheslow Station, and on the train they boarded were Heavy Stone and The Fox. The girls greeted each other as though they had been separated for a year.

"Never was such a clatter of tongues," declared the plump girl, "since the workmen struck on the tower of Babel. Here we are—off for the sunrise—and traveling due west. How do you make that out?"

"That's easy—anybody could see it with half an eye," said The Fox.

"Half an eye, eh?" demanded Heavy. "And

Cyclops had a whole one. Say! did you hear about the boy in school who was asked by his teacher (he must have been in Tommy's class) 'Who was Cyclops?' He was a bright boy. He answered: 'The man who wrote the encyclopædia.' The association of ideas was something fierce—eh?"

"Dear me, Jennie," admonished The Fox, "you are getting slangier every day."

"Never mind; I'm not losing flesh over it. Don't you," returned the careless "heavyweight."

It was a long, but not a tedious, ride to Darrowtown. The young folk had left Cheslow just before dark, and their sleeper was sidetracked at the end of the journey, some time in the very early morning. When Ruth first opened her eyes she could scarcely—for the moment—think where she was.

Then she peered out of the narrow window above her berth and saw a section of the railroad yard and one side of Railroad Avenue beyond. The right of way split Darrowtown in two halves and there were grade crossings at the intersections of the principal cross streets.

Long as she had been away from the place, the girl recognized the houses and the stores, and every other landmark she could see. No further sleep for her, although it was scarcely dawn.

She hopped softly out of the berth, disturbed

none of her companions or even the porter nodding in his corner, and dressed hurriedly. She made her toilette and then went into the vestibule and from thence climbed down to the cinder path.

There was an opening in the picket fence, and she slipped through in a moment. Dear old Darrowtown! Ruth's heart throbbed exultantly and she smiled, although there were tears in her eyes.

There was the Brick Church on the corner. The pastor and his wife had been so kind to her! And up this next street was the way to the quiet cemetery where her father and mother were buried. Ruth turned her steps in that direction first of all.

The sun came up, red and jovial; the birds twittered and sang in the great maples along the way; even in the graveyard a great flock of blackbirds "pumped" and squeaked in noisy, joyous chorus.

The dew sparkled on leaf and bush, the flowers were fragrant, the cool breeze fanned her cheek, and the bird chorus rose higher and higher. How could one be sad long on such a beautiful, God-made morning?

Impossible! Ruth plucked a spray of a flowering shrub for both graves, and laid them on the mounds tenderly, with a little prayer. Here slept the dead peacefully, and God had raised her up many, many friends!

The early chimneys were smoking in the suburbs of the town. A screen-door slammed now and then. One man whom she knew slightly, but who did not remember her, was currying his horse in an alley by his stable. Mrs. Barnsworth, notably the smartest housewife in Darrowtown, was starting already with her basket for market—and woe be to the grocer or marketman if the shops were not open when she arrived!

Stray cats ran along the back fences. A dog ran out of a yard to bark at Ruth, but then thought better of it and came to be patted instead.

And then, suddenly, she came in sight of the back garden of Miss True Pettis!

It was with that kind-hearted but peculiar spinster lady that Ruth had lived previous to being sent to the Red Mill. Miss Pettis was the neighborhood seamstress and, as she often had told Ruth, she worked hard "with both tongue and needle" for every dollar she earned.

For Miss True Pettis had something more than dressmaking to do when she went out "by the day" to cut and fit and run the sewing machine. Darrowtown folk expected that the seamstress should have all the latest gossip at her tongue's end when she came to sew!

Now, Miss True Pettis often laid down the

law. "There's two kinds of gossip. One the Bible calls the seventh abomination, an' I guess that's right. But for shut-in folks like most housekeepers in Darrowton, a dish of harmless gossip is more inspiritin' than a bowl of boneset tea!

"Lemme have somethin' new to tell folks about folks—that's all. But it must be somethin' kind," Miss Pettis declared. "No backbitin', or church scandal, or neighborhood rows. If Si Lumpkin's cat has scratched Amoskeag Lanfell's dog, let the cat and the dog fight it out, I say; no need for Si and Amoskeag, who have been friends and neighbors for years an' years, gettin' into a ruction over it.

"I never take sides in any controversy—no, ma'am! If ye can't say a good word for a neighbor, don't say nothin' to *me*. That's what I tell 'em. But if ye know anythin' good about 'em, or they've had any streak o' good luck, or the like, tell me. For the folks in this town—'specially the wimmen folks that don't git out much—is just a-honin' for news, and True Pettis, when she goes out by the day, has gotter have a full and plenty supply of it."

Ruth, smiling quietly to herself, remembered how the thin, sallow, quick spoken lady looked when she said all this. Miss Pettis's eyes were black and snapping; her nose was a beak; she bit

off threads as though her temper was biting, too. But Ruth knew better. A kinder-hearted mortal never lived than the little old seamstress.

Now the visitor ran across the garden—neatly bedded and with graveled paths in which the tiniest weed dared not show its head—and reached the kitchen porch. Miss Pettis was always an early riser, and the smoke of her chimney was now only a faint blue column rising into the clear air.

Yes! there was a rattle of dishes in the kitchen. Ruth tiptoed up the steps. Then she—to her amazement—heard somebody groan. The sound was repeated, and then the seamstress's voice murmured:

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! Oh, dear, oh, dear! whatever shall I do——"

Ruth, who had intended opening the door softly and announcing that she had come to breakfast, forgot all about the little surprise she was bent on giving Miss Pettis. Now she peered fearfully in at the nearest window.

Miss Pettis was just sitting down in her rocker, and she rocked to and fro, holding one hand with the other, continuing to groan.

"Oh, dear, me!" cried Ruth, bursting in at the door. "What in the world is the matter, my dear?"

"It's that dratted felon—— Why, Ruthie

Fielding! Did you drop from the sky, or pop up out o' the ground? I never!"

The dressmaker got up quickly, but struck her hand against the chair-arm. Instantly she fell back with a scream, and Ruth feared she had fainted. A felon is a terribly painful thing!

Ruth ran for a glass of water, but before she could sprinkle any of it on Miss Pettis' pale face the lady's eyes opened and she exclaimed:

"Don't drop any of that on my dress, child—it'll spot. I'm all right now. My mercy! how that hurt."

"A felon, Miss Pettis? How very dreadful," cried Ruth, setting down the glass of water.

"And I ain't been able to use my needle for a week, and the dishwashin'—well, it jest about kills me to put my hands in water. You can see—the sight this kitchen is."

"Now, isn't it lucky that I came this morning—and came so early, too?" cried Ruth. "I was going to take breakfast with you. Now I'll get the breakfast myself and fix up the house——Oh, yes, I shall! I'll send word down to the hotel to my friends—they'll take breakfast there—and we can have a nice visit, Miss True," and Ruth very carefully hugged the thin shoulders of the seamstress, so as not to even jar the felon on her right fore-finger.

CHAPTER IX

THE SUNRISE COACH

RUTH was determined to have her way, and really, after one has suffered with a felon for a week, one is in no shape to combat the determination of as strong a character as that of the girl of the Red Mill!

At least, so Miss True Pettis found. She bowed to Ruth's mandate, and sat meekly in the rocking chair while that young lady bustled about, made the toast, poached eggs, made a pot of the kind of tea the spinster liked, and just as she liked it—— Oh, Ruth had not forgotten all her little ways, although she had been gone so long from the seamstress's tiny cottage here in Darrowtown.

All the time, she was as cheerful as a bluebird —and just as chatty as one, too! She ran out and caught a neighbor's boy, and sent him scurrying down to the sidetracked sleeping car with a note to Helen. The rest of the crowd expected at Sunrise Farm would arrive on an early morning train on the other road, and both parties were to meet for breakfast at the Darrowtown Inn.

The vehicle to transport them to the farm, however, was not expected until ten o'clock.

Therefore, Ruth insisted, she had plenty of time to fix up the house for Miss Pettis. This she proceeded to do.

"I allus *did* say you was the handiest youngun that ever was born in Darrowtown," said the seamstress, with a sigh of relief, as Ruth, enveloped in a big apron, set to work.

Ruth did more than wash dishes, and sweep, and clean, and scrub. All the time she told Miss Pettis about her life at the Red Mill, and her life at the boarding school, and of many and various things that had happened to her since, two years before, she had gone away from Darrowtown to take up her new life with Uncle Jabez.

Not that she had not frequently written to Miss Pettis; but one cannot write the particulars that can be told when two folks are "gossiping." Miss True Pettis had not enjoyed herself—felon and all!—so much for ages as she did that forenoon.

And she would have a long and interesting story to tell regarding "Mary Fielding's little girl" when again she took up her work of going out by the day and bringing both her nimble needle and her nimble tongue into the homes of the busy Darrowtown housewives.

On the other hand, Miss Pettis told Ruth all the news of her old home; and although the girl from the Red Mill had no time then to call upon any other of her one-time friends—not even Patsy Hope—she finally went away feeling just as though she had met them all again. For little of value escaped Miss Pettis, and she had told it all.

The Brick Church clock was striking ten when Ruth ran around the corner and came in sight of the Darrowtown Inn. There was a crowd of girls and boys on the porch, and before it stood a great, shiny yellow coach, drawn by four sleek horses.

"Bobbins" himself—Madge Steele's big, white-haired brother, who attended the military academy with Tom Cameron, was already on the coachman's seat, holding the reins in most approved style. Beside him sat a man in livery, it was true; but Bob himself was going to drive the four-in-hand.

"Isn't that scrumptious, Ruth?" demanded Belle Tingley, one of those who had arrived on the other railroad. "Where have you been all the time? Helen was worried for fear you wouldn't get here."

"And here's Ralph!" exclaimed Ruth, heartily shaking hands with one of Belle's brothers. "I'm all right. I used to live here in Darrow-

town, you know, and I was making calls. And here is Isadore!"

"Oh, I say, Ruth!" exclaimed the chap in knickerbockers, who was so sharp and curious that he was always called "Busy Izzy" Phelps. "Where have you been all the time? We were going to send a searching party after you."

"You needn't mind, sir. I can find my way around a bit yet," laughed Ruth.

"All ready, now!" exclaimed Bob, importantly, from the high seat. "Can't keep these horses standing much longer."

"All right, little boy," said his sister, marshaling the girls down the steps of the hotel. "Don't you be impatient."

"It's the horses," he complained. "See that nigh leader beginning to dance?"

"Tangoing, I suppose?—or is it the hesitation?" laughed Lluella Fairfax. "May anybody sit up there beside you, Mr. Bob?"

"I'm afraid not. But there's room on top of the coach for all of you, if you'll crowd a bit."

"Me behind with the horn!" cried Tom, swinging himself up into the little seat over the luggage rack.

"Now, girls, there are some steep places on the road," said Madge. "If any of you feel nervous, I advise you to come inside with me."

"Ha!" ejaculated Heavy. "It's not my

nerves that keep me from climbing up on that thing—don't think it. But I'll willingly join you, Madge," and the springs creaked, while the girls laughed, as Heavy entered the coach.

They were all quickly seated—the boys of course riding on the roof. Ruth, Helen, Lluella and Belle occupied the seat directly behind the driver. Jane Ann Hicks, who had been spending the intervening week since school closed with Heavy, and would return to Montana after their sojourn at Sunrise Farm, was the only other girl who ventured to ride a-top the coach.

"All ready?" sang out Bobbins, with a backward glance.

Tom put the long silver horn to his lips and blew a blast that startled the Darrowtown echoes, and made the frisky nigh leader prance again. Bob curled the long lash of the yellow whip over the horses' ears, and at the crack of it all four plunged forward.

There was a crowd to see the party off. Darrowtown had not become familiar with the Steeles' yellow coach. In fact, there were not many wealthy men's estates around the town as yet, and such "goings-on" as this coaching party of girls and boys was rather startling to the staid inhabitants of Darrowtown.

The road through the town proper was very good, and the heavy coach wheels rolled over it

smoothly. As soon as they reached the suburbs, however, the way was rough, and the horses began to climb, for Darrowtown was right at the foot of the hills, on the very highest of which Sunrise Farm lay.

There were farms here and there along the way, but there was a great deal of rough country, too. Although it was a warm day, those on top of the coach were soon well shaded by the trees. The road wound through a thick piece of wood, where the broad-branched trees overhung the way and—sometimes—almost brushed the girls from their seats.

"Low bridge!" called Bobbins, now and again, and they would all squeal and stoop while the leafy branches brushed above them.

Bobbins had been practicing a good deal, so as to have the honor of driving his friends home from Darrowtown, and they all praised him for being so capable.

As for Tom, he grew red in the face blowing that horn to warn the foxes in the hills and the rabbits in the bushes that they were coming.

"You look out, Tommy!" advised Madge from below. "You'll blow yourself all away tooting so much, and goodness knows, we don't want any accident before luncheon. Mother is expecting all manner of things to happen to us after we get to the farm; but I promised faith-

fully I'd bring you all home to one o'clock luncheon in perfect order."

"A whole lot you've got to do with it," grunted Busy Izzy, ungallantly. "It's Bobbins that's doing the chief work."

Three hours to Sunrise Farm, yet it was only fifteen miles. The way was not always uphill, but the descents were as hard to get over as the rising ground, and the coach rolled and shook a good deal over the rougher places.

Bye and bye they began to look down into the valleys from the steeps the horses climbed. At one place was a great horseshoe curve, around which the four steeds rattled at a smart pace, skirting a precipice, the depth of which made the girls shriek again.

"I never did see such a road," complained Lluella.

"We saw worse at Silver Ranch—didn't we, Ann?" demanded Ruth of the Montana girl.

"Well, this is bad enough, I should hope," said Belle Tingley. "Lucky there is a good brake on this coach. Where'd we be——?"

As it chanced, the coach had just pitched over the brow of another ridge. Bob had been about to point out proudly the white walls of the house at Sunrise Farm which surmounted the next hill.

But there had been a rain within a week, and a hard one. Right here there was a small wash-

out in the road, and Bob overlooked it. He did not swerve the trotting horses quickly enough, and the nigh fore-wheel dropping into this deep, deep rut.

It is true Bob became a little excited. He yelled "Whoa!" and yanked back on the lines, for the nigh leader had jumped. The girls screamed as the coach came to an abrupt stop.

The four horses were jerked back by the sudden stoppage; then, frightened, they all leaped forward together.

"Whoa, there!" yelled Bob again, trying to hold them in. Something broke and the nigh leader swung around until he was at right angles with his team-mate.

The leader had snapped a tug; he forced his mate over toward the far side of the road; and there the ground broke away, abruptly and steeply, for many, many yards to the bottom of the hill.

There was neither fence, nor ditch, to guard passengers on the road from catastrophe.

CHAPTER X

"TOUCH AND GO"

As it chanced, Mr. Steele's groom, who had been sent with the coach and who sat beside Bob, was on the wrong side to give any assistance at this crucial moment. To have jumped from the seat threatened to send him plunging down the undefended hillside—perhaps with the coach rolling after him!

For some seconds it did seem as though the horses would go down in a tangle and drag the coach and its occupants after them.

Bob was doing his best with the reins, but the frisky nigh leader was dancing and plunging, and forcing his mate off the firm footing of the road. Indeed, the latter animal was already slipping over the brink.

"Get him!" yelled Bob, meaning the horse that had broken the trace and had stirred up all the trouble.

But who was to "get him"? That was the difficulty. The groom could not climb over the young driver to reach the ground.

There was at least one quick-witted person

aboard the Sunrise coach in this "touch and go" emergency. Ruth was not afraid of horses. She had not been used to them, like Ann Hicks, all her life, but she was the person now in the best position to help Bob.

To reach the ground on the nigh side of the coach Ann Hicks would have to climb over a couple of boys. Ruth was on that end of the seat and she swung herself off smartly, and landed firmly on the road.

"Look out, Ruth!" shrieked her chum, "you'll be killed!"

Ruth had no intention of getting near the heels of the horse that had broken its harness. She darted around to his head and seized his bridle. His mate was already scattering gravel down the hillside as he plunged.

Ruth, paying no attention to the shrieks of the girls or the commands of the groom and the boys, jerked the nigh horse's head around, and so gave his mate a chance to obtain firm footing again. She instantly led both horses toward the inside of the road.

Tom was off his perch by now and had dashed forward to her aid. Amid the gabble of the others, they seemed the only two cool persons in the party.

"Oh! hold them tight, Tom!" cried his sister. "Don't let them run."

"Pshaw! they don't want to run," growled Bobbins.

The groom climbed carefully over him and leaped down into the road. Tom was looking at Ruth with shining eyes.

"You're the girl for me, Ruthie," he whispered in a sudden burst of enthusiasm. "I never saw one like you. You always have your wits about you."

Ruth smiled and blushed. A word of approbation from Tom Cameron was sweeter to her than the praise of any other of her young friends. She gave him a grateful look, and then turned back to the coach, where the girls were still as excited as a swarm of bees.

They all wanted to get down into the road, until Madge positively forbade it, and Ruth swung herself up to her seat again.

"You can't do any good down there, and you'd only be in the way," Madge said. "And the danger's over now."

"Thanks to Ruthie!" added Helen, squeezing her chum.

"Oh, you make too much fuss about it," said Ruth. "I just grabbed the bridle."

"Yes," said Mercy, from inside. "I thought I'd need my aeroplanes to fly with, when that horse began to back over the edge of the hill. You're a good child, Ruthie. I always said so."

The others had more or less to say about Ruth's action and she was glad to turn the conversation to some other subject.

Meanwhile the groom had mended the harness, and now he and Tom led the leaders to straighten out the team, and the four horses threw themselves into their collars and jerked the coach-wheel out of the gutter.

The trouble had delayed them but slightly, and soon Tom was cheerfully winding the horn, and the horses were rattling down a more gentle descent into the last valley.

From this to the top of the hill on which the Steele home stood was a steady ascent and the horses could not go rapidly. Bob and Madge pointed out the objects of interest as they rolled along—the farmhouses that were to be torn down, the fences already straightened, and the dykes and walls on which Mr. Steele's men were at work.

"When this whole hill is father's, you'll see some farm," crowed Bobbins.

"But whose place is *that?*" demanded one of the girls, behind him, suddenly.

The coach had swung around a turn in the road where a great, bald rock and a border of trees on the right hand, hid all that lay beyond on this gentle slope. The other girls cried out at the beauty of the scene.

A gable-roofed farmhouse, dazzlingly white, with green blinds, stood end to the road. There were great, wide-branched oaks all about it. The sod was clipped close and looked like velvet. Yet the surroundings of the homestead were rather wild, as though Nature had scarcely been disturbed by the hand of man since the original clearing was made here in the hillside forest.

There were porches, and modern buildings and "ells" added to the great old house, but the two huge chimneys, one at either end, pronounced the building to be of the architecture of the earliest settlers in this section of the State.

There were beds of old-fashioned flowers; there was a summerhouse on the lawn, covered with vines; altogether it was a most beautiful and "homey" looking place.

"Whose place is it?" repeated the questioner.

"Oh, that? Caslon's," grunted Bob. "He's the chap who won't sell out to father. Mean old thing."

"Why, it's a love of an old place!" exclaimed Helen.

"Yes. It is the one house father was going to let stand on the hill beside our own. You see, we wanted to put our superintendent in it."

Just then an old gentleman came out of the summer house. He was a portly, gray mustached, bald-headed man, in clean linen trousers and a

white shirt with a short, starched bosom. He wore no collar or necktie, but looked clean and comfortable. He smiled at the young people on the coach jovially.

Behind him stood a motherly lady some years his junior. She was buxom and smiling, too.

Bobbins jerked his head around and snapped his whip over the leaders' ears. "These are the people," he said.

"Who?" asked Belle Tingley.

"The Caslons."

"But they're real nice looking people," Helen exclaimed, in wonder.

"Well, they're a thorn—or a pair of thorns—in my father's flesh. You'd better not boost them before him."

"And they don't want to sell their old home?" queried Ruth, softly. Then to herself, she whispered: "And who could blame them? I wouldn't sell it, either, if it were mine."

CHAPTER XI

TOBOGGANING IN JUNE

THE four horses climbed briskly after that, and brought the yellow coach to an old stone gateway. At the end of the Caslon farm the stone wall had begun, and now it stretched ahead, up over the rise, as far as anything was to be seen. Indeed, it seemed to melt right into the sky.

Bobbins turned the leaders' noses in at the gateway. Already it was shown that the new owner had begun to improve the estate. The driveway was an example of what road-making should be—entirely different from the hap-hazard work done on the country roads.

There were beautiful pastures on either hand, all fenced in with wire—"horse high, bull strong, and pig tight," as Bobbins explained, proudly. There were horses in one pasture and a herd of cows in another. Beyond, sheep dotted a rocky bit of the hillside, and the thin, sweet "baa-as" of the lambs came to their ears as the coach rolled on.

The visitors were delighted. Every minute they saw something to exclaim over. A pair of

beautifully spotted coach dogs raced down the drive, and cavorted about the coach, eagerly welcoming them.

When they finally topped the hill and came out upon the tableland on which the house and the main buildings of Sunrise Farm stood, they received a welcome indeed.

There was a big farm bell hung to a creaking arm in the water-tower beside the old colonial dwelling. The instant the leaders' ears topped the rise, and while yet the coach was a long way off, several youngsters swung themselves on the bell-rope, and the alarm reverberated across the hills and valleys in no uncertain tone.

Beside this, a cannon that was something bigger than a toy, "spoke" loudly on the front lawn, and a flag was run up the pole set here in a prominent place before the house. Mr. and Mrs. Steele stood on the broad veranda, between the main pillars, to receive them, and when the coach drew up with a flourish, the horde of younger Steeles—Madge's and Bob's brothers and sisters, whom the big sister called "steel filings"—charged around from the bell-tower. There were four or five of the younger children, all seemingly about of an age, and they made as much confusion as an army.

"Welcome to Sunrise, girls and boys," said Mr. Steele, who was a short, brisk, chubby man,

with an abrupt manner, but with an unmistakably kind heart, or he would not have sanctioned the descent of this horde of young folk upon the place. "Welcome to Sunrise! We want you all to have a good time here. The place is open to you, and all Mother Steele begs is that you will not break your necks or get into any other serious trouble."

Mrs. Steele was much taller than her husband; it was positive that Madge and Bobbins got their height from her side of the family. All the younger Steele seemed chubby and round like their father.

Everybody seemed so jolly and kind that it was quite surprising to see how the faces of both Mother and Father Steele, as well as their children, changed at the long lunch table, half an hour later, when the name of Caslon, the neighboring farmer, was mentioned.

"What d'ye think they have been telling me at the stables, Pa?" cried Bobbins, when there was a lull in the conversation so that he could be heard from his end of the table to his father's seat.

"I can't say. What?" responded Mr. Steele.

"About those Caslons. What do you suppose they're going to do now?"

"Ha!" exclaimed the gentleman, his face darkening. "Nothing you have heard could surprise me."

"I bet this does," chuckled Bob. "They are

going to take a whole raft of fresh air kids to board. What do you know about that? Little ragamuffins from some school, or asylum, or hospital, or something. Won't they make a mess all over this hill?"

"Ha! he's done that to spite me," exclaimed Mr. Steele. "But I'll post my line next to his, and if those youngones trespass, I'll see what my lawyer in Darrowtown can do about it."

"It shows what kind of people those Caslons are," said Mrs. Steele, with a sigh. "Of course, they know such a crowd of children will be very annoying to the neighbors."

"And we're the only neighbors," added Bob.

"Seems to me," said Madge, slowly, "that I have heard the Caslons always *do* take a bunch of fresh air children in the summer."

"Oh, I fancy he is doing it this year just to spite us," said her father, shortly. "But I'll show him——"

He became gloomy, and a cloud seemed to fall upon the whole table for the remainder of the meal. It was evident that nothing the neighboring farmer could do would be looked upon with favorable eyes by the Steeles.

Ruth did not comment upon the situation, as some of the other girls did out of hearing of their hosts. It *did* seem too bad that the Steeles

should drag this trouble with a neighbor into the public eye so much.

The girl of the Red Mill could not help but remember the jovial looking old farmer and his placid wife, and she felt sure they were not people who would deliberately annoy their neighbors. Yet, the Steeles had taken such a dislike to the Caslons it was evident they could see no good in the old farmer and his wife.

The Steeles had come directly from the city and had brought most of their servants with them from their city home. They had hired very few local men, even on the farm. Therefore they were not at all in touch with their neighbors, or with any of the "natives."

Mr. Steele was a city man, through and through. He had not even lived in the country when he was a boy. His own children knew much more about out-of-doors than he, or his wife.

The host was a very successful business man, had made money of late years, and wished to spend some of his gains now in laying out the finest "gentleman's farm" in that quarter of the State. To be balked right at the start by what he called "a cowhide-booted old Rube" was a cross that Mr. Steele could not bear with composure.

The young folks, naturally (save Ruth), were

not much interested in the controversy between their hosts and the neighboring farmer. There was too much fun going on for both girls and boys to think of much beside.

That afternoon they overran the house and stables, numbered the sheep, watched the tiny pigs and their mothers in the clover-lot, were delighted with the colts that ran with their mothers in the paddock, played with the calves, and got acquainted in general with the livestock of Sunrise Farm.

"Only we haven't goats," said Bobbins. "I've been trying to get father to buy some Angoras. Old Caslon has the best stock anywhere around, and father says he won't try to buy of *him*. I'd like to send off for a good big billy-goat and turn him into Caslon's back pasture. I bet there'd be a fight, for Caslon's got a billy that'll chase you just as soon as he'd wink."

"We'd better keep out of *that* pasture, then," laughed one of the girls.

"Oh, father's forbidden us trespassing on Caslon's land. We'd like to catch him on *our* side of the line, that's all!"

"Who—Mr. Caslon, or the billy?" asked Tom, chuckling.

"Either one," said Bob, shaking his head threateningly.

Everyone was in bed early that night, for all

were tired; but the boys had a whispered colloquy before they went to sleep in their own big room at the top of the house, and Bob tied a cord to his big toe and weighted the other end so that it would drop out of the window and hang just about head-high above the grass.

The first stableman up about the place ran over from the barns and gave Master Bob's cord a yank, according to instructions, and pretty nearly hauled that ingenious chap out of bed before the eastern sky was even streaked with light.

"Gee! have we got to get up now?" demanded Busy Izzy, aroused, as were the other boys, by Bobbins dancing about the floor and rubbing his toe. "Somebody has been foolin' you—it's nowheres near morning."

"Bet a dog jumped up and bit that string you hung out of the window," chuckled Tom Cameron.

He looked at his watch and saw that it really was after four o'clock.

"Come on, then!" Tom added, rolling Ralph Tingley out of bed. "We must do as we said, and surprise the girls."

"Sh!" commanded Bobbins. "No noise. We want to slide out easy."

With much muffled giggling and wrestling, they dressed and made their way downstairs. The maids were just astir.

The boys had something particular to do, and they went to work at it very promptly, under Tom Cameron's leadership. Behind one of the farther barns was a sharp, but smooth slope, well sodded, which descended to the line of the farm that adjoined Mr. Caslon's. There, at the bottom, the land sloped up again to the stone wall that divided the two estates.

It was a fine place for a slide in winter, somebody had said; but Tom's quick wit suggested that it would be a good place for a slide in summer, too! And the boys had laid their plans for this early morning job accordingly.

Before breakfast they had built a dozen barrel-stave toboggans—each long enough to hold two persons, if it was so desired.

Tom and Bobbins tried them first and showed the crowd how fine a slide it really was down the long, grassy bank. The most timid girl in the crowd finally was convinced that it was safe, and for several hours, the shrieks of delight and laughter from that hillside proved that a sport out of season was all the better appreciated because it was novel.

Over the broad stone wall was the pasture in which Caslon kept his flock of goats. Beautiful, long-haired creatures they were, but the solemn old leader of the flock stamped his feet at the curious girls and boys who looked over the wall, and shook his horns.

Somewhere, along by the boundary of the two estates, Bob said there was a spring, and Ruth and Helen slipped off by themselves to find it. A wild bit of brush pasture soon hid them from the view of their friends, and as they went over a small ridge and down into the deeper valley, the laughter and shouting of those at the slide gradually died away behind them.

The girls had to cross the stone wall to get at the spring, and they did not remember that in doing so they were "out of bounds." Bob had said nothing about the spring being on the Caslon side of the boundary.

Once beside the brook, Helen must needs explore farther. There were lovely trees and flowering bushes, and wild strawberries in a small meadow that lured the two girls on. They were a long way from the stone fence when, of a sudden, a crashing in the bushes behind them brought both Ruth and Helen to their feet.

"My! what's that?" demanded Helen.

"Sounds like some animal."

Ruth's remark was not finished.

"The goat! it's the old billy!" sang out Helen, and turned to run as the horned head of the bewhiskered leader of the Angora herd came suddenly into view.

CHAPTER XII

A NUMBER OF INTRODUCTIONS

"We must run, Ruthie!" Helen declared, instantly. "Now, there's no use in our trying to face down that goat. Discretion is the better part of valor—— Oh!"

The goat just then shook his horns and charged. Ruth was not much behind her chum. She saw before Helen, however, that they were running right away from the Steele premises.

"We're getting deeper and deeper into trouble, Helen," she panted. "Don't you *see?*"

"I can't see much. Oh! there's a tree we can both climb, I am sure."

"But I don't want to climb a tree," objected Ruth.

"All right. You stay down and play tag with Mr. Billy Goat. Me for the high and lofty!" and she sprang up as she spoke and clutched the low limb of a widely branching cedar.

"I'll never leave my pal!" Ruth declared, giggling, and jumping for another limb.

Both girls had practiced on the ladders in the school gymnasium and they quickly swung them-

selves up into the tree. The goat arrived almost on the instant, too. At once he leaped up with his fore-feet against the bole of the tree.

"My goodness me!" gasped Helen. "He's going to climb it, too."

"You know goats *can* climb. They're very sure-footed," said her chum.

"I know all that," admitted Helen. "But I didn't suppose they could climb trees."

The goat gave up *that* attempt, however, very soon. He had no idea, it seemed, of going away and leaving his treed victims in peace.

He paced around and around the cedar, casting wicked glances at the girls' dangling feet, and shaking his horns in a most threatening way. What he would do to them if he got a chance would "be a-plenty," Helen declared.

"Don't you suppose he'll get tired, bye and bye?" queried her chum, despondently.

"He doesn't look as though he ever got wearied," returned Helen. "What a savage looking beast he is! And such whiskers!"

"I wouldn't make fun of him," advised Ruth, timidly. "I believe he understands—and it makes him madder! Oh! see him!"

Mr. Goat, impatient of the delay, suddenly charged the tree and banged against it with his horns in a desperate attempt to jar down the girls perched above.

"Oh, the foolish billy!" cooed Helen. "We're not ripe enough to drop off so easily. But he thinks we are."

"You can laugh," complained Ruth. "But I don't think this is much fun."

"Not for the goat, anyway. He is getting so angry that he may have apoplexy. Let's shout. Maybe the boys will hear us."

"Not 'way down here, I fear," returned Ruth. "We can't hear a sound from *them*. But let's try."

They raised their voices in unison, again and again. But there came no reply, save that a number of Mr. Billy Goat's lady friends came trooping through the brush and looked up at the girls perched so high above them.

"Bla-a-a-t! bla-a-a-at!" quoth the chorus of nannies.

"The same to you, and many of them!" replied Helen, bowing politely.

"Look out! you'll fall from the limb," advised Ruth, much worried.

"And what a fall would then be there, my countrymen!" sighed Helen. "Say, Ruth! did you ever notice before what an expressive countenance a goat has? Now, Mr. Billy, here, looks just like a selectman of a country school board—long whiskers and all."

"You stop making fun of him," declared

Ruth, shaking her head. "I tell you it makes him mad."

"Goaty, goaty, go away,
Come again some other day,
Ruthie and Helen want to get down and play!"

sang Helen Cameron, with a most ridiculous expression.

"We'll never get down unless somebody comes to drive that beast away," cried Ruth, in disgust.

"And I bet nobody comes over to this end of the farm for days at a time."

"That's it! keep on! make it just as bad as you can," groaned Ruth. "Do you know it will soon be luncheon time, Helen?"

"But that won't bother Mr. Goat. He hopes to lunch off us, I guess."

"But we can't stay here, Helen!" cried Ruth, in despair.

"You have my permission to hop right down, my dear, and make the closer acquaintance of Sir Capricornus, and all the harem. Ex-cuse me! I think after due consideration I will retain my lofty perch——Ugh!"

"You came pretty near slipping off that time!" exclaimed Ruth. "I wouldn't be too funny, if I were you."

"Maybe you are right," agreed her friend, in

a more subdued tone. "Dear me! let us call again, Ruth!"

So both girls again raised their voices. This time there was a response, but not from the direction of the stone wall they had crossed to reach the spring.

"Hello!" called a jovial sounding voice. "Hello up there!"

"Hello yourself!" shouted Helen. "Oh, do, *do* come and drive away these awful goats."

There was a hearty laugh at this reply, and then a man appeared. Ruth had guessed his identity before ever he came in view. It was the portly Mr. Caslon.

"Well, well, my dears! how long have you been roosting up there?" he demanded, laughing frankly at them. "Get out, you rascal!"

This he said to the big goat, who started for him with head lowered. Mr. Caslon leaped nimbly to one side and whacked the goat savagely across the back with his knobby stick. The goat kept right on down the hillside, evidently having had enough of *that* play, and the nannies followed, bleating.

"You can come down now, young ladies," said the farmer. "But I wouldn't come over into this pasture to play much. The goats don't like strangers."

"We had no business to come here at all, but

we forgot," explained Ruth, when both she and her chum had descended from the tree. "We were warned not to come over on this side of the line."

"Oh, indeed? you're from up on the hill-top?" he asked.

"We are visiting Madge Steele—yes," said Helen, looking at him curiously.

"Ah! I saw all you young folk going by yesterday. You should have a fine time about here," said the farmer, smiling broadly. "And, aside from the temper of the goats, I don't mind you all coming over here on my land if you like."

The girls thanked him warmly for rescuing them from their predicament, and then ran up the hill to put the stone wall between them and the goats before there was more trouble.

"I like him," said Helen, referring to Mr. Caslon.

"So do I," agreed Ruth. "And it's too bad that Mr. Steele and he do not understand each other."

Although their escapade with the goats was a good joke—and a joke worth telling to the crowd—Ruth decided that it would be just as well to say nothing about it, and she told Helen so.

"I expect you are right," admitted her chum. "It will only cause comment because we went

out of bounds, and became acquainted with Mr. Caslon. But I'm glad the old goat introduced us," and she laughed and tossed her head.

So they joined their friends, who had gotten tired by this time of tobogganing in June, and they all trooped up the hill again to the house. It was growing warm, and the hammocks and lounging chairs in the shade of the verandas attracted them until noon.

After luncheon there was tennis and croquet on the lawns, and toward evening everybody went driving, although not in the yellow coach this time.

The plans for the following day included a long drive by coach to a lake beyond Darrowtown, where they had a picnic lunch, and boated and fished and had a glorious time in general.

Bobbins drove as before, but there were two men with the party to do the work and look after the horses, and Mrs. Steele herself was present to have an oversight of the young folk.

Bob Steele was very proud of his ability to drive the four-in-hand, and when they swung through Darrowtown on the return trip, with the whip cracking and Tom tooting the horn, many people stopped to observe the passing of the turnout.

Every other team got out of their way—even the few automobiles they passed. But when they

got over the first ridge beyond the town and the four horses broke into a canter, Mrs. Steele, who sat up behind her son on this journey, suddenly put a hand upon his shoulder and called his attention to something ahead in the road.

"Do have a care, my son," she said. "There has been an accident there—yes? Don't drive too fast——"

"By jiminy!" ejaculated Ralph Tingley. "That's a breakdown, sure enough."

"A farm wagon. There's a wheel off," cried Ann Hicks, leaning out from the other end of the seat the better to see.

"And who are all those children in blue?" demanded Mercy Curtis, looking out from below. "There's such a lot of them! One, two, three, four, five—— Goodness me! they jump about so like fleas that I can't count them!"

"Why, I bet I know what it is," drawled Bobbins, at last. "It's old Caslon and his load of fresh airs. He was going to town to meet them to-day, I believe. And he's broken down before he's half way home with them—and serves him good and right!"

CHAPTER XIII

"THE TERRIBLE TWINS"

RUTH heard Bob's last expression, despite the rattling of the harness and the chattering of the girls on, and in, the coach, and she was sorry. Yet, could he be blamed so much, when similar feelings were expressed daily by his own father regarding the Caslons?

Mrs. Steele was shocked as well. "My dear son!" she exclaimed, in a low voice, leaning over his shoulder. "Be careful of your tongue. Don't say things for which you might be sorry—indeed, for which I am sure you *are* sorry when you stop to think."

"Huh! Isn't that old Caslon as mean as he can be?" demanded Bobbins.

"I am sure," the good lady sighed, "that I wish he would agree to sell his place to your father, and so have an end of all this talk and worriment. But I am not at all sure that he hasn't a right to do as he pleases with his own property."

"Well—now—Mother——"

But she stopped him with: "At any rate, you must halt and offer him help. And those children—I hope none of them has been hurt."

"Pooh! you couldn't hurt kids like those," declared Bob.

But he brought the horses down to a walk and the yellow coach approached the scene of the accident at a temperate pace.

The big farm-wagon, the body of which had been filled with straw for the youngsters to ride in, had been pulled to the side of the road out of the way of passing vehicles. It was clear that the smashed wheel was past repair by any amateur means, for several spokes were broken, and the hub was split.

The youngsters whom Mr. Caslon had taken aboard at the railway station in Darrowtown were dancing about and yelling like wild Indians. As the coach came nearer, the excited party upon it could more carefully count the blue-clad figures, and it was proved that there were twelve.

Six girls were in blue gingham frocks, all alike, and all made "skimpy" and awkward looking. The six boys were in new blue overalls and cotton shirts. The overalls seemed all of one size, although the boys were not. They must have been purchased at the store of one size, and whether a boy was six, or twelve, he wore the same number.

Each of the children, too, carried a more or less neatly made up parcel, the outer covering of which was a blue and white bandanna, and the contents of which was the change of clothing the institution allowed them.

"What a terrible noise they make!" sighed Mrs. Steele. "And they are perfect little terrors, I suppose. But they *are* clean."

They had not been out of the sight of the institution nurse long enough to be otherwise, for she had come as far as Darrowtown with them. But they *were* noisy, sure enough, for each one was trying to tell his or her mates how he or she felt when the wheel crashed and the wagon went over.

"I reckon I oughtn't to have risked that wheel, after all," said Mr. Caslon, doffing his hat to Mrs. Steele, but smiling broadly as he looked up from his examination of the wheel.

"Whoa, Charlie! Don't get too near them heels, youngsters. Charlie an' Ned are both old duffers like me; but you can't fool around a horse's legs without making him nervous.

"And don't pull them reins. I don't want 'em to start right now. . . . Yes, ma'am. I'll haf ter lead the horses home, and that I don't mind. But these young ones—— Now, let that whip lay right where it is, young man! That's right.

"You see, ma'am," he proceeded, quite calmly

despite all that was going on about him, and addressing himself to Mrs. Steele, "it's too long a walk for the little ones, and I couldn't tote 'em all on the backs of the horses——

"Now, you two curly heads there—what do you call 'em?"

"The Terrible Twins!" quoth two or three of the other orphans, in chorus.

"I believe ye! I believe ye! They jest bile over, *they* do. Now, you two boys," he added, addressing two youngsters, very much alike, about of a height, and both with short, light curly hair, "never mind tryin' to unharness Charlie and Ned. *I'll* do that.

"Ye see, ma'am, if you could take some of the little ones aboard——" he suggested to Mrs. Steele.

The coach was well filled, yet it was not crowded. The girls began to call to the little folks to get aboard even before Mrs. Steele could speak.

"There's lots of room up here," cried Ruth, leaning from her end of the seat and offering her hand. The twins ran at once to climb up and fought for "first lift" by Ruth.

"Oh, yes! they can get aboard," said Mrs. Steele. "All there is room for."

And the twelve "fresh airs" proved very quickly that there was room for them all. Ruth

had the "terrible twins" on the seat with her in half a minute, and the others swarmed into, or on top of, the coach almost as quickly.

"There now! that's a big lift, I do declare," said the farmer, hanging the chains of the horses' traces upon the hames, and preparing to lead the pair along the road.

"My wife will be some surprised, I bet," and he laughed jovially. "I'm certain sure obleeged to ye, Mis' Steele. Neighbors ought to be neighborly, an' you air doin' me a good turn this time—yes, ma'am!"

"Now, you see," growled Bob, as the four coach horses trotted on, "he'll take advantage of this. We've noticed him once, and he'll always be fresh."

"Hush, my son!" whispered Mrs. Steele. "Little pitchers have big ears."

"Huh!" exclaimed one of the wriggling twins, looking up at the lady sideways like a bird. "I know what *that* means. *We're* little pitchers—Dickie an' me. We've heard that before—ain't we, Dickie?"

"Yep," announced his brother, nodding wisely.

These two were certainly wise little scamps! Willie did most of the talking, but whatever he said his brother agreed to. Dickie being so chary with speech, possibly his brother felt that he must exercise his own tongue the more, for he chattered

away like a veritable magpie, turning now and then to demand:

"Ain't that so, Dickie?"

"Yep," vouchsafed the echo, and, thus championed, Willie would rattle on again.

Yes. They was all from the same asylum. There were lots more of boys and girls in that same place. But only twelve could get to go to this place where they were going. They knew boys that went to Mr. Caslon's last year.

"Don't we, Dickie?"

"Yep."

No. They didn't have a mama or papa. Never had had any. But they had a sister. She was a big girl and had gone away from the asylum. Some time, when they were big enough, they were going to run away from the asylum and find her.

"Ain't we, Dickie?"

"Yep."

Whether the other ten "fresh airs" were as funny and cute as the "terrible twins," or not, Ruth Fielding did not know, but both she and Mrs. Steele were vastly amused by them, and continued to be so all the way to the old homestead under the hill where the children had come to spend a part of the summer with Mr. and Mrs. Caslon.

CHAPTER XIV

"WHY! OF COURSE!"

"I HOPE you told that Caslon woman, Mother, to keep those brats from boiling over upon our premises," said Mr. Steele, cheerfully, at dinner that evening, when the story of the day's adventures was pretty well told.

"Really, John, I had no time. *Such* a crowd of eels—— Well! whatever she may deserve," said Mrs. Steele, shaking her head, "I am sure she does not deserve the trouble those fresh air children will bring her. And she—she seems like such a nice old lady."

"Who's a nice old lady?" demanded her husband, from the other end of the long table, rather sharply.

"Farmer Caslon's wife."

"Humph! I don't know what she is; I know what *he* is, however. No doubt of that. He's the most unreasonable——"

"Well, they'll have their hands full with all those young ones," laughed Madge Steele, breaking in upon her father, perhaps because she did

not wish him to reveal any further to her guests his ideas upon this topic.

"What under the sun can they do it for?" demanded Lluella Fairfax.

"Just think of troubling one's self with a parcel of ill-bred children like those orphanage kids," added Belle Tingley.

"Oh, they do it just to bother the neighbors, of course," growled Bobbins, who naturally believed all his father said, or thought, to be just right.

"They take a world of trouble on themselves, then, to spite their neighbors," laughed Mercy Curtis, in her sharp way. "That's cutting one's nose off to spite one's face, sure enough!"

"Goodness only knows *why* they do it," began Madge, when Ruth, who could keep in no longer, now the topic had become generally discussed among the young people, exclaimed:

"Both the farmer and his wife look to be very kindly and jolly sort of people. I am sure they have no idea of troubling other folk with the children they take to board. They must be, I think, very charitable, as well as very fond of children."

"Trust Ruth for seeing the best side of it," laughed Heavy.

"And the right side, too, I bet," murmured Tom Cameron.

"We'll hope so," said Mr. Steele, rather grimly. "But if Caslon lets them trespass on my land, he'll hear about it, sharp and plenty!"

Now, it so happened, that not twenty-four hours had passed before the presence of the "fresh air kids" was felt upon the sacred premises of Sunrise Farm. It was very hot that next day, and the girls remained in the shade, or played a desultory game of tennis, or two, or knocked the croquet balls around a bit, refusing to go tramping through the woods with the boys to a pond where it was said the fish would bite.

"So do the mosquitoes—I know them," said Mercy Curtis, when the boys started. "Be honest about it, now; I bet you get ten mosquito bites to every fish-bite. Tell us when you get back."

Late in the afternoon the rural mail carrier was due and Ruth, Helen, Madge and Heavy started for the gate on the main road where the Steeles had their letter box.

A little woolly dog ran after Madge—her mother's pet. "Come on, Toodles!" she said, and then all four girls started to race with Toodles down to the gate.

Suddenly Toodles spied something more entertaining to bark at and caper about than the girls' skirts. A cat was slipping through the bushes beside the wall, evidently on the trail of some

unconscious bird. Toodles, uttering a glad "yap, yap, yap!" started for the cat.

Two tousled, curly heads appeared at the gateway. Below the uncapped heads were two thin bodies just of a size, clothed in shirts and overalls of blue.

"Hello, kiddies!" said Heavy. "How did you get here?"

"On our feet—didn't we, Dickie?" responded Master Willie.

"Yep," said Dickie.

"Oh, dear me! Toodles will hurt that cat!" cried Madge. "One of you boys run and save her—save kitty!" she begged.

But as the youngsters started off as per direction, the cat turned savagely upon Toodles. She snarled like a wildcat, leaped for his fur-covered back, and laid in with her claws in a way that made the pup yell with fright and pain.

"Oh, never mind the cat! Help Toodles! Help Toodles!" wailed Madge, seeing her pet in such dire trouble.

The youngsters stopped with disgust, as Toodles went kiting up the hill, yelping.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Willie. "Toodles don't need helpin'. Did'ye ever see such a dog? What he needs is a nurse—don't he, Dickie?"

"Yep," declared the oracular Dickie, with emphasis.

Heavy dropped down on the grass and roared. As the cat had quickly returned from the chase, Madge and Helen joined her. It *was* too funny. The "terrible twins" were just slipping out of the gate, when Ruth called to them.

"Don't go yet, boys. Are you having a good time?"

"We ain't allowed in here," said Willie.

"Who told you so?"

"The short, fat man with the squinty eyes and the cane," declared Willie, in a matter of fact way.

"Short—fat—squinty—— My goodness! I wonder if he can mean my father?" exclaimed Madge, inclined to be offended.

"But you can stand there and talk with us," said Ruth, strolling toward the boys. "So you are having a nice time at Mr. Caslon's?"

"Bully—ain't we, Dickie?"

"Yep," agreed the echo.

"And you won't be glad to go back to the orphanage when you have to leave here?"

"Say, who ever was glad to go to a 'sylum?" demanded Willie, with scorn.

"And you can't remember any other home, either of you?" asked Ruth, with pity.

"Huh! we 'member just the same things. Our ages is just alike, they be," said Willie, with scorn.

"They have you there, Ruth," chuckled Heavy.

Ruth Fielding was really interested in the two youngsters. "And you are all alone in the world?" she pursued.

"Nope. We gotter sister."

"Oh! so you said."

"And it's so, too. She used ter be at the 'sylum," explained Willie. "But they sent her off to live with somebody. And we was tried out by a lady and a gentleman, too; but we was too much work for the lady. We made too much extry washin'," said Willie, solemnly.

"My goodness me!" exclaimed Ruth, suddenly. "What are your names?"

"I'm Willie; he's Dickie."

"But Willie and Dickie *what?*" demanded the startled Ruth.

"No, ma'am. It ain't that. It's Raby," declared the youngster, coolly. "And our sister, *she's* Sadie Raby. She's awful smart and some day, she told us, she's goin' to come an' steal us from the 'sylum, and then we'll all live together and keep house."

"Will you hear this, Helen?" demanded Ruth, eagerly, to her chum who had run to her.

"Why, of course! we might have known as much, if we had been smart. These are the twins Sadie told you about. And we never guessed!"

CHAPTER XV

THE TEMPEST

RUTH was much interested in the fresh air children, and so was Helen. They found time to walk down to the Caslon farm and become acquainted with the entire twelve. Naturally, the "terrible twins" held their attention more than the others, for it *did* seem so strange that the little brothers of Sadie Raby should come across Ruth's path in just this way.

Of course, in getting so well acquainted with the children, Ruth and her chum were bound to know the farmer and his wife better. They were very plain, "homey" sort of people, just as Ruth had guessed, and it appeared that they were not blessed with an over-abundance of ready money. Few farmers in Mr. Caslon's circumstances are.

What means they had, they joyfully divided with the youngsters they had taken to board. The Caslons had no living children; indeed, the two they had had, years ago, died while they were yet babies. This Mrs. Caslon confided to Ruth.

"It left an empty place in our hearts," she said, softly, "that nothing but other little children can fill. John has missed them fully as much as I have. Yes; he lets these little harum-scarums pull him around, and climb all over him, and interfere with his work, and take up his time a good deal. Yes, I know the place looks a sight, inside the house and out, when they go away.

"But for a few weeks every year we have a host of young things about us, and it keeps our hearts young. The bother of 'em, and the trouble of 'em, is nothing to the good they do us both. Ah, yes!

"Yes, I've often thought of keeping one or two of them for good. There's a-many pretty ones, or cunning ones, we'd like to have had. But then—think of the disappointment of the rest of the darlings!

"And it would have narrowed down our sympathy—mine and John's," proceeded Mrs. Caslon, shaking her head gently. "We'd have centered all our love and longin' into them we took for keeps, just as we centered all our interest in the two little ones God lent us for a little while, long ago.

"Havin' a number of 'em each year, and almost always different ones, has been better, I guess—better for all hands. It keeps John and me interested more, and we try to make them so

happy here that each poor, unfortunate orphan will go away and remember his or her summer here for the rest of their lives.

"And they *do* have so little to be happy over, these orphans—and it takes so very little to make them happy.

"If I had money—much money," continued the farmer's wife, clasping her hands, fervently, "I'd move many orphan asylums, and such like, out of the close, hot cities, where the little ones are cramped for room and air, and put each of them on a farm—a great, big farm. City's no place for children to grow up—'specially those that have no fathers and mothers.

"You can't tell me but that these young ones miss their parents less here on this farm than they do back in the brick building they live in most of the year," concluded the good woman, earnestly.

Ruth quite fell in love with the old lady—who did not appear so very old, after all. Perhaps she had kept her heart young in serving these "fresh air" orphans, year after year. And Mr. Caslon seemed a very happy, jolly sort of man, too.

The two girls stole away quite frequently to watch the youngsters play, or to teach them new means of entertaining themselves, or to talk with the farmer's wife. But they did not wish the

other girls, and the Steeles, to know where they went on these occasions.

Their host, who was the nicest kind of a man in every other way, seemed determined to look upon Caslon as his enemy; and Mr. Steele was ready to do anything he could to oust the old couple from their home.

"Pshaw! a man like Caslon can make a good living anywhere," Mr. Steele declared. "His crops just *grow* for him. He's an A-1 farmer—I'd like to find as good a one before next year, to superintend my whole place. He's just holding out for a big price for his farm, that's all he's doing. These hayseeds are money-mad, anyway. I haven't offered him enough for his old farm, that's all."

Ruth doubted if this were true. The Caslon place was one of the oldest homesteads in that part of the State, and the house had been built by a Caslon. Mr. Steele could not appreciate the fact that there was a sentiment attached to the farmer's occupancy of his old home.

The Caslons had taken root here on this side-hill. The farmer and his wife were the last of the name; they had nobody to will it to. But they loved every acre of the farm, and the city man's money did not look good enough to them.

Ruth Fielding hungered to straighten out the tangle. She wished she might make Mr. Steele

understand the old farmer's attitude. Was there not, too, some way of settling the controversy in a way satisfactory to both parties?

Meanwhile the merry party of young folk at Sunrise Farm was busy every waking hour. There were picnics, and fishing parties, and games, and walks, and of course riding galore, for Mr. Steele had plenty of horses.

Ruth and Helen privately worked up some interest among the girls and boys visiting the farm, in a celebration on the Fourth for the fresh air children. Ruth had learned that the farmer had purchased some cheap fireworks and the like for the entertainment of the orphans; but Ruth and her chum wanted to add to his modest preparations.

Ten dollars was raised, and Tom Cameron took charge of the fund. He was to ride into town the afternoon before the Fourth to make the purchases, but just about as he was to start, a thunderstorm came up.

Mr. Steele, who was a nervous man, forbade any riding or driving with that threatening cloud advancing over the hills. The lightning played sharply along the edges of the cloud and the thunder rolled ominously.

"You youngsters don't know what a tempest is like here in the hills," said Mr. Steele. "Into the house—all of you. Take that horse and cart

back to the stables, Jackson. If Tom wants to go to town, he'll have to wait until the shower is over—or go to-morrow."

"All right, sir," agreed young Cameron, cheerfully. "Just as you say."

"Are all those girls inside?" sharply demanded Mr. Steele. "I thought I saw the flutter of a petticoat in the shrubbery yonder."

"I'll see," said Tom, running indoors.

Nervous Mr. Steele thought he saw somebody there behind the bushes, before he heard from Tom. It had already begun to rain in big drops, and suddenly there was a flash of lightning and a report seemingly right overhead.

The host turned up his coat collar, thrust his cap over his ears, and ran out across the lawn toward the path behind the shrubbery. It led to a summer house on the side lawn, but this was a frail shelter from such a tempest as this that was breaking over the hill.

Mr. Steele saw the flutter of a skirt ahead, and dashed along the path, the rain pelting him as he ran.

"Come back here! Come to the house, you foolish girl!" he cried, and popped into the summer house just as the clouds seemed to open above and the rain descend in a flood.

It was so dark, and Mr. Steele was so blinded for a moment, that he could scarcely see

the figure of whom he was in search. Then he beheld a girl crouching in a corner, with her hands over her ears to shut out the roar of the thunder and her eyes tightly closed to shut out the lightning.

"For mercy's sake! get up and come into the house. This place will be all a-flood in a minute," he gasped.

Suddenly, as he dragged the girl to her feet by one shoulder, he saw that she was not one of the house party at all. She was a frail, shrinking girl, in very dirty clothing, and her face and hands were scratched and dirty, too. A regular ragamuffin she appeared.

"Why—why, where did *you* come from?" demanded Mr. Steele.

The girl only stuttered and stammered, looking at him fearfully.

"Come on! never mind who you are," he sputtered. "This is no place for you in this tempest. Come into the house!"

He set out on a run again for the front veranda, dragging her after him. The girl did not cry, although she was certainly badly frightened by the storm.

They reached the door of the big house, saturated. Here Mr. Steele turned to her again.

"Who are you? What are you doing around here, anyway?" he demanded.

"Ain't—ain't this the place where they got a bunch of fresh air kids?" asked the girl.

"What?" gasped Mr. Steele. "I should say not! Are you one of those young ones Caslon has taken to board to the annoyance of the whole neighborhood? Ha! what were you doing trespassing on my land?"

"I ain't neither!" returned the girl, pulling away her hand. "You lemme be."

"I forbade any of you to come up here——"

"I ain't neither," reiterated the girl. "An' I don't know what you mean. I jest got there. And I'm lookin' for the place where the fresh air kids stay."

In the midst of this the door was drawn open and Mrs. Steele and some of the girls appeared.

"Do come in, Father," she cried. "Why! you're soaking wet. And that child! bring her in, whoever she is. Oh!"

Another flash of lightning made them all cower —all but Ruth Fielding, who had crept forward to look over Mrs. Steele's shoulder. Now she dashed out and seized the bedrabbled looking stranger by the hand.

"Why, Sadie Raby! who'd ever expect to see you here? Come in! do let her come in out of the storm, Mrs. Steele. I know who she is," begged Ruth.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RUNAWAY

MADGE said, in something like perplexity: "You *do* pick up the strangest acquaintances, Ruth Fielding. She really does, Ma. But that has always been Ruth's way."

Mrs. Steele was first disturbed over her husband's condition. "Go right away and change into dry garments—do, Father," she urged. "You will get your death of cold standing there. And shut the door. Oh! that lightning!"

They had to wait for the thunder to roll away before they could hear her again, although Mr. Steele hurried upstairs without another glance at the bedrabbled child he had brought in out of the storm.

"This—this girl must go somewhere and dry herself," hesitated Mrs. Steele, when next she spoke. "My! isn't she a sight? Call one of the maids, someone——"

"Oh, dear Mrs. Steele!" exclaimed Ruth, eagerly, "let me take Sadie upstairs and look after her. I am sure I have something she can put on."

"So have I, if you haven't," interposed Helen.

"And my clothes will come nearer fitting her than Ruth's. Ruth is getting almost as fat as Heavy!"

"There is no need of either of you sacrificing your clothes," said Mrs. Steele, slowly. "Of course, I have plenty of outgrown garments of my own daughters' put away. Yes. You take care of her if you wish, Ruth, and I will hunt out the things."

Here the strange girl interposed. She had been darting quick, shrewd glances about the hall at the girls and boys there gathered, and now she said:

"Ye don't hafter do nothing for me. A little rainwater won't hurt me—I ain't neither sugar nor salt. All I wants to know is where them fresh air kids is stayin'. I ain't afraid of the rain—it's the thunder and lightning that scares me."

"Goodness knows," laughed Madge, "I guess the water wouldn't hurt you. But we'll fix you up a little better, I guess."

"Let Ruth do it," said Mrs. Steele, sharply. "She says she knows the girl."

"She's a friend of mine," said the girl of the Red Mill, frankly. "You surely remember me, Sadie Raby?"

"Oh, I remember ye, Miss," returned the runaway. "You was kind to me, too."

"Come on, then," said Ruth, briskly. "I'm only going to be kind to you again—and so is Mrs. Steele going to be kind. Come on!"

An hour later an entirely different looking girl appeared with Ruth in the big room at the top of the house which the visiting girls occupied. Some of them had come upstairs, for the tempest was over now, and were making ready for dinner by slow stages, it still being some time off, and there was nothing else to do.

"This is Sadie Raby, girls," explained Ruth, quietly. "She is the sister of those cute little twins that are staying at the Caslons' place. She has had a hard time getting here, and because she hasn't seen Willie and Dickie for eight months, or more, she is very anxious to see them. They are all she has in the world."

"And I reckon they're a handful," laughed Heavy. "Come on! tell us all about it, Sadie."

It was because of the "terrible twins" that Ruth had gotten Sadie to talk at all. The girl, since leaving "them Perkinses," near Briarwood, had had a most distressful time in many ways, and she was reticent about her adventures.

But she warmed toward Ruth and the others when she found that they really were sincerely interested in her trials, and were, likewise, interested in the twins.

"Them kids must ha' growed lots since I seen

'em," she said, wistfully. "I wrote a letter to a girl that works right near the orphanage. She wrote back that the twins was coming out here for a while. So I throwed up my job at Campton and hiked over here."

"Dear me! all that way?" cried Helen, pityingly.

"I walked farther than that after I left them Perkinses," declared Sadie, promptly. "I walked clean from Lumberton to Cheslow—followed the railroad most of the way. Then I struck off through the fields and went to a mill on the river, and worked there for a week, for an old lady. She was nice——"

"I guess she is!" cried Ruth, quickly. "Didn't you know that was *my* home you went to? And you worked for Aunt Alvirah and Uncle Jabez."

No, Sadie had not known that. The little old woman had spoken of there being a girl at the Red Mill sometimes, but Sadie had not suspected the identity of that girl.

"And then, when you were still near Cheslow, my brother Tom, and his dog, rescued you from the tramps," cried Helen.

"Was that your brother, Miss?" responded Sadie. "Well! he's a nice feller. He got me a ride clear to Campton. I've been workin' there and earnin' my board and keep. But I couldn't save much, and it's all gone now."

"But what do you really expect to do here?" asked Madge Steele, curiously.

"I gotter see them kids," declared Sadie, doggedly. "Seems to me, sometimes, as though something would bust right inside of me here," and she clutched her dress at its bosom, "if I don't see Willie and Dickie. I thought this big house was likely where the fresh airs was."

"I should say not!" murmured Madge.

"They're all right—don't you be afraid," said Ruth, softly.

"I thought mebbe the folks that was keepin' the kids would let me work for them," said Sadie, presently. "For kids is a lot of trouble, and I'm used to 'em. The matron at the home said I had a way with young'uns."

She told them a good deal more about her adventures within the next half hour, but Madge had left the room just after making her last speech. While the girls were still listening to the runaway, a maid rapped at the door.

"Mr. Steele will see this—this strange girl in the library," announced the servant.

Sadie looked a little scared for a moment, and glanced wildly around the big room for some way of escape.

"Gee! I ain't got to talk with that man, have I?" she whispered.

"He won't bite you," laughed Heavy.

"He's just as kind as kind can be," declared Helen.

"I'll go down with you," said Ruth, decisively. "You have plenty of friends now, Sadie. You mustn't be expecting to run away all the time."

Sadie Raby went with Ruth doubtfully. The latter was somewhat disturbed herself when she saw Mr. Steele's serious visage.

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Steele?" suggested Ruth, timidly. "But she is all alone—and I thought it would encourage her to have me here——"

"That is like your kind heart, Ruth," said the gentleman, nodding. "I don't mind. Madge has told me her story. It seems that the child is rather wild—er—flighty, as it were. I suppose she wants to run away from us, too?"

"I ain't figurin' to stay here," said Sadie, doggedly. "I'm obleeged to you, but this ain't the house I was aimin' for."

"Humph! no. But I am not sure at all that you would be in good hands down there at Caslon's."

Ruth was sorry to hear him say this. But Sadie broke in with: "I don't keer how they treat me as long as I'm with my brothers. And *they* are down there, this Ruth girl says."

"Yes. I quite understand that. But we all have our duty to perform in this world," said

Mr. Steele, gravely. "I wonder that you have fallen in with nobody before who has seen the enormity of letting you run wild throughout the country. It is preposterous—wrong—impossible! I never heard of the like before—a child of your age tramping in the open."

"I didn't do no harm," began Sadie, half fearful of him again.

"Of course it is not your fault," said Mr. Steele, quickly. "But you were put in the hands of people who are responsible to the institution you came from for their treatment of you——"

"Them Perkinses?" exclaimed Sadie, fearfully. "I won't never go back to them—not while I'm alive I won't! I don't care! I jest won't!"

She spoke wildly. She turned to run from the room and would have done so, had not Ruth been there to stop her and hold her in her arms.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BLACK DOUGLASS

"Oh, don't frighten her, Mr. Steele!" begged Ruth, still holding the half wild girl. "You would not send her back to those awful people?"

"Tut, tut! I am no ogre, I hope," exclaimed the gentleman, rather put out of countenance at this outburst. "I only mean the child well. Doesn't she understand?"

"I won't go back to them Perkinses, I tell you!" cried Sadie, with a stamp of her foot.

"It is not my intention to send you back. I mean to look up your record and the record of the people you were placed with—Perkins, is it? The authorities of the institution that had the care of you, should be made to be more careful in their selection of homes for their charges.

"No. I will keep you here till I have had the matter sifted. If those—those Perkinses, as you call them, are unfit to care for you, you shall certainly not go back to them, my girl."

Sadie looked at him shrewdly. "But I don't want to stay here, Mister," she blurted out.

"My girl, you are not of an age when you should be allowed to choose for yourself. Others, older and wiser, must choose for you. I would not feel that I was doing right in allowing you to run wild again——"

"I gotter see the twins—I jest *gotter* see 'em," said Sadie, faintly.

"And whether that Caslon is fit to have charge of you," bitterly added Mr. Steele, "I have my doubts."

"Oh, surely, you will let her see her little brothers?" cried Ruth, pleadingly.

"We will arrange about that—ahem!" said Mr. Steele. "But I will communicate at once—by long distance telephone—with the matron of the institution from which she came, and they can send a representative here to talk with me——"

"And take me back there?" exclaimed Sadie. "No, I sha'n't! I sha'n't go! So there!"

"Hoity-toity, Miss! Let's have no more of it, if you please," said the gentleman, sternly. "You will stay here for the present. Don't you try to run away from me, for if you do, I'll soon have you brought back. We intend to treat you kindly here, but you must not abuse our kindness."

It was perhaps somewhat puzzling to Sadie Raby—this attitude of the very severe gentleman. She had not been used to much kindness in her

life, and the sort that is forced on one is not generally appreciated by the wisest of us. Therefore it is not strange if Sadie failed to understand that Mr. Steele really meant to be her friend.

"Come away, Sadie," whispered Ruth, quite troubled herself by the turn affairs had taken. "I am so sorry—but it will all come right in the end——"

"If by comin' right, Miss, you means that I am goin' to see them twins, you can jest *bet* it will all come right," returned Sadie, gruffly, when they were out in the hall. "For see 'em I will, an' *him,* nor nobody else, won't stop me. As for goin' back to them Perkinses, or to the orphanage, we'll see 'bout that," added Sadie, to herself, and grimly.

Ruth feared very much that Mr. Steele would not have been quite so stern and positive with the runaway, had it not been for his dislike for the Caslons. Had Sadie's brothers been stopping with some other neighbor, would Mr. Steele have delayed letting the runaway girl go to see them?

"Oh, dear, me! If folks would only be good-natured and stop being so hateful to each other," thought the girl of the Red Mill. "I just *know* that Mr. Steele would like Mr. Caslon a whole lot, if they really once got acquainted!"

The rain had ceased falling by this time. The tempest had rolled away into the east. A great rainbow had appeared and many of the household were on the verandas to watch the bow of promise.

It was too wet, however, to venture upon the grass. The paths and driveway glistened with pools of water. And under a big tree not far from the front of the house, it was discovered that a multitude of little toads had appeared—tiny little fellows no larger than one's thumbnail.

"It's just been rainin' toads!" cried one of the younger Steele children—Bennie by name. "Come on out, Ruthie, and see the toads that comed down with the rainstorm."

Tom Cameron had already come up to speak with Sadie. He shook hands with the runaway girl and spoke to her as politely as he would have to any of his sister's friends. And Sadie, remembering how kind he had been to her on the occasion when the tramps attacked her near Cheslow, responded to his advances with less reluctance than she had to those of some of the girls.

For it must be confessed that many of the young people looked upon the runaway askance. She was so different from themselves!

Now that she was clean, and her hair brushed

and tied with one of Ruth's own ribbons, and she was dressed neatly, Sadie Raby did not *look* much different from the girls about her on the wide porch; but when she spoke, her voice was hoarse, and her language uncouth.

Had she been plumper, she would have been a pretty girl. She was tanned very darkly, and her skin was coarse. Nevertheless, given half the care these other girls had been used to most of their lives, and Sadie Raby would have been the equal of any.

Ruth came strolling back to the veranda, leaving Bennie watching the toads—which remained a mystery to him. He was a lively little fellow of six and the pet of the whole family.

As it chanced, he was alone out there on the drive, and the others were now strolling farther and farther away from him along the veranda. The boy ran out farther from the house, and danced up and down, looking at the rainbow overhead.

Thus he was—a pretty sight in the glow of the setting sun—when a sudden chorus of shouts and frightened cries arose from the rear of the house.

Men and maids were screaming. Then came the pounding of heavy hoofs.

Around the curve of the drive charged a great black horse, a frayed and broken lead-rope hanging from his arching neck, his eyes red and glow-

ing, and his sleek black body all a-quiver with the joy of his escape.

"The Black Douglass!" ejaculated Tom Cameron, in horror, for the great horse was charging straight for the dancing child in the driveway.

It was the most dangerous beast upon Sunrise Farm—indeed, almost the only savage creature Mr. Steele had retained when he bought out the former owner of the stock farm and his stud of horses.

The Black Douglass was a big creature, with an uncertain temper, and was handled only by the most careful men in Mr. Steele's employ. Somehow, on this occasion, the brute had been allowed to escape.

Spurring the gravel with his iron shod hoofs, the horse galloped straight at little Bennie. The child, suddenly made aware of his peril by the screams of his brothers and sisters, turned blindly, staggered a few steps, and fell upon his hands and knees.

Mr. Steele rushed from the house, but he was too far away. The men chasing the released animal were at a distance, too. Tom Cameron started down the steps, but Helen shrieked for him to return. Who was there to face the snorting, prancing beast?

There was a flash of a slight figure down the steps and across the sod. Like an arrow from

a strong bow, Sadie Raby darted before the fallen child. Nor was she helpless. The runaway knew what she was about.

As she ran from the veranda, she had seized a parasol that was leaning against one of the pillars. Holding this in both hands, she presented it to the charging horse, opening and shutting it rapidly as she advanced.

She leaped across Bennie and confronted the Black Douglass. The flighty animal, seeing something before him that he did not at all understand, changed his course with a frightened snort, and dashed off across the lawn, cutting out great clods as he ran, and so around the house again and out of sight.

Mr. and Mrs. Steele were both running to the spot. The gentleman picked up the frightened Bennie, but handed him at once to his mother. Then he turned and seized the girl by her thin shoulders.

"My dear girl! My dear girl!" he said, rather brokenly, turning her so as to face him. "That was a brave thing to do. We can't thank you enough. You can't understand——"

"Aw, it warn't anything. I knowed that horse wouldn't jump at us when he seen the umbrel'. Horses is fools that way," said Sadie Raby, rather shamefacedly.

But when Mrs. Steele knelt right down in the

damp gravel beside her, and with one arm around Bennie, put the other around the runaway and hugged her—hugged her *tight*—Sadie was quite overcome, herself.

Madge Steele was crying frankly. Bobbins came rushing upon the scene, and there was a general riot of exclamation and explanation.

"Say! you goin' to let me see my brothers now?" demanded the runaway, who had a practical mind, if nothing more.

"Bob," said his father, quickly, "you have the pony put in the cart and drive down there to Caslon's and bring those babies up here."

"Aw, Father! what'll I tell Caslon?" demanded the big fellow, hesitatingly.

"Tell him—tell him——" For a moment, it was true, that Mr. Steele was rather put to it for a reply. He found Ruth beside him, plucking his sleeve.

"Let me go with Bobbins, sir," whispered the girl of the Red Mill. "I'll know what to say to Mr. and Mrs. Caslon.

"I guess you will, Ruth. That's right. You bring the twins up here to see their sister." Then he turned and smiled down at Sadie, and there were tears behind his eyeglasses. "If I have my way, young lady, your coming here to Sunrise Farm will be the best thing—for you and the twins—that ever happened in your young lives!"

CHAPTER XVIII

SUNDRY PLANS

PERHAPS Sadie Raby would have been just as well pleased had Mr. Steele allowed her to go to the Caslons' to see her brothers, instead of having them brought up the hill to Sunrise Farm. The gentleman, however, did not do this because he disliked Caslon; Sadie had saved Bennie from what might have been certain death, and the wealthy Mr. Steele was quite as grateful as he was obstinate.

He was determined to show his gratitude to the friendless girl in a practical manner. And the object of his gratitude would include her two little brothers, as well. Oh, yes! Mr. Steele proposed to make Sadie Raby glad that she had saved Bennie from the runaway horse.

The other girls and boys, beside the members of the Steele family, were anxious now to show their approval of Sadie's brave deed. The wanderer was quite bewildered at first by all the attention she received.

She was such a different looking girl, too, as has been already pointed out, from the miserable

little creature who had been found by Mr. Steele in the shrubbery, that it was not hard to develop an interest in Sadie Raby.

Encircled by the family and their young visitors on the veranda, Sadie again related the particulars of her life and experience—and it was a particularly sympathetic audience that listened to her. Mr. Steele drew out a new detail that had escaped Ruth, even, in her confidences with the strange child.

Although the "terrible twins" were unable to remember either father or mother—orphan asylums are not calculated to encourage such remembrances in infant minds—Sadie, as she had once said to Ruth, could clearly remember both her parents.

And although they had died in distant Harburg, where the children had been put into the orphanage, Sadie remembered that the family had removed to that city, soon after the twins were born, from no less a place than Darrowtown!

"Me, I got it in my head that mebbe somebody would remember pa and mom in Darrowtown, and would give me a chance. That's another reason I come hiking clear over here," said Sadie.

"We'll hunt your friends up—if there are any," Mr. Steele assured her.

Sadie looked at him shrewdly. "Say!" said

she, "you treat me a whole lot nicer than you did a while ago. Do folks have to do somethin' for your family before you forget to be cross with them?"

It certainly was a facer! Mr. Steele flushed a little and scarcely knew what to say in reply to this frank criticism. But at that moment the two-wheel cart came into sight with the pony on the trot, and Ruth and the twins waving their hands and shouting.

The meeting of the little chaps with their runaway sister was touching. The three Raby orphans were very popular indeed at Sunrise Farm just then.

Mr. Steele frankly admitted that this might be a case where custom could be over-ridden, and the orphanage authorities ignored.

"Whether those Perkins people she was farmed out to, were as harsh as she says——" he began, when Ruth interrupted eagerly:

"Oh, sir! I can vouch for *that*. The man was an awful brute. He struck *me* with his whip, and I don't believe Sadie told a story when she says he beat her."

"I wish I'd been there," ejaculated Tom Cameron, in a low voice, "when the scoundrel struck you, Ruth. I would have done something to him!"

"However," pursued Mr. Steele, "the girl is

here now and near to Darrowtown, which she says is her old home. We may find somebody there who knew the Rabys. At any rate, they shall be cared for—I promise you."

"I know!" cried Ruth, suddenly. "If anybody will remember them, it's Miss Pettis."

"Another of your queer friends, Ruth?" asked Madge, laughing.

"Why—Miss True Pettis isn't queer. But she knows about everybody who lives in Darrowtown, or who ever did live there—and their histories from away back!"

"A human encyclopedia," exclaimed Heavy.

"She's a lovely lady," said Ruth, quietly, "and she'll do anything to help these unfortunate Rabys —be sure of that."

The late dinner was announced, and by that time the twins, as well as Sadie, had become a little more used to their surroundings. Willie and Dickie had been put into "spandy clean" overalls and shirts before Mrs. Caslon would let them out of her hands. They were really pretty children, in a delicate way, like their sister.

With so many about the long dining table, the meals at the Steele home at this time were like a continuous picnic. There was so much talking and laughter that Mr. and Mrs. Steele had to communicate with signs, for the most part, from their stations at either end of the table, or else

they must send messages back and forth by one of the waitresses.

The twins and Sadie were down at Mrs. Steele's end of the table on this occasion, with the girls all about them. Ruth and the others took a lot more interest in keeping the orphans supplied with good things than they did in their own plates.

That is, all but Heavy; of course *she* wasted no time in heaping her own plate. The twins were a little bashful at first; but it was plain that Willie and Dickie had been taught some of the refinements of life at the orphanage, as both had very good table manners.

They had to be tempted to eat, however, and finally Heavy offered to run a race with them, declaring that she could eat as much as both of the boys put together.

Dickie was just as silent in his sister's presence as usual, his communications being generally in the form of monosyllables. But he was faithful in echoing Willie's sentiments on any and every occasion—noticeably at chicken time. The little fellows ate the fricassee with appetite, but they refused the nice, rich gravy, in which the cook had put macaroni. Mrs. Steele urged them to take gravy once or twice, and finally Sadie considered that she should come to the rescue.

"What's the matter with you kids?" she de-

manded, hoarsely, in an attempt to communicate with them aside. "Ye was glad 'nough to git chicken gravy on Thanksgivin' at the orphanage —warn't ye?"

"Yes, I know, Sadie," returned Willie, wistfully. "But they never left the windpipes in it—did they, Dickie?"

"Nope," responded Dickie, feelingly, likewise gazing at the macaroni askance.

It set the table in a roar and finally Willie and Dickie were encouraged to try some of the gravy, "windpipes" and all!

"They're all right," laughed Busy Izzy, greatly delighted. "They're one—or two—of the seven wonders of the world——"

"Pooh!" interrupted Heavy, witheringly, "You don't even know what the seven wonders of the world are."

"I can tell you one thing they're *not*," grinned Busy Izzy. "They're not a baseball team, for there's not enough of them. Now will you be good?"

Madge turned her head suddenly and ran right into Belle Tingley's elbow, as Belle was reaching up to settle her hair-ribbon.

"Oh, oh! My eye! I believe you poked it out, Belle. You have *such* sharp elbows," wailed Madge.

"You'll have to see Doc. Blodgett at Lumber-

ton," advised Heavy, "and get your eye' tended to. He's a great old doctor——"

"Why, I didn't know he was an eye doctor," exclaimed Madge. "I thought he was a chiropodist."

"He used to be," Heavy returned, with perfect seriousness. "He began at the foot and worked up, you see."

Amid all the fun and hilarity, Mr. Steele called them to order. This was at the dessert stage, and there were tall cones of parti-colored ice cream before them, with great, heaping plates of cake.

"Can you give me a moment's attention, girls and boys?" asked their host. "I want to speak about to-morrow."

"The 'great and glorious,'" murmured Heavy.

"We've all promised to be good, sir," said Tom. "No pistols, or explosives, on the place."

"Only the cannon," interposed Bobbins. "You're going to let us salute with *that;* eh, Pa?"

"I'm not sure that I shall," returned his father, "if you do not give me your attention, and keep silent. We are determined to have a safe and sane Fourth on Sunrise Farm. But at night we will set off a splendid lot of fireworks that I bought last week——"

"Oh, fine, Pa! I do love fireworks," cried Madge.

"The girls are as bad as the boys, Mother," said Mr. Steele, shaking his head. "What I wanted to say," he added, raising his voice, "was that we ought to invite these little chaps—these brothers of Sadie Raby— to come up at night to see our show."

"Oh, let's have all the fresh airs, Pa!" cried Madge, eagerly. "*What* a good time they'd have."

"I—don't—know," said her father, soberly, looking at his wife. "I am afraid that will be too much for your mother."

"Mr. Caslon has some fireworks for the children," broke in Ruth, timidly. "I happen to know that. And Tom was going down to buy ten dollar's worth more to put with what Mr. Caslon has."

"Humph!" said Mr. Steele.

"You see, some of us thought we'd give the little folk a good time down there, and it wouldn't bother you and Mrs. Steele, sir," Ruth hastened to explain.

"Well, well!" exclaimed the gentleman, not very sharply after all, "if those Caslons can stand the racket, I guess mother and I can—eh, mother?"

"We need not have them in the house," said

Mrs. Steele. "We can put tables on the veranda, and give them ice cream and cake after the fireworks. Get the men to hang Chinese lanterns, and so forth."

"Bully!" cried the younger Steeles, in chorus, and the visitors to Sunrise Farm were quite delighted, too, with this suggestion.

CHAPTER XIX

A SAFE AND SANE FOURTH?

Of course, somebody had to go to the Caslons and explain all this, and that duty devolved upon Ruth. Naturally, permission had to be sought of the farmer and his wife before the "fresh air kids" could be carried off bodily to Sunrise Farm.

It was decided that the ten dollars, of which Tom had taken charge, should be spent for extra bunting and lanterns to decorate with, and to buy little gifts for each of the fresh airs to find next his or her plate on the evening of the Fourth.

Therefore, Tom started again for Darrowtown right after breakfast, and Ruth rode with him in the high, two-wheeled cart.

Ruth had two important errands. One was in Darrowtown. But the first stop, at Mr. Caslon's, troubled her a little.

How would the farmer and his wife take the idea of the Steeles suddenly patronizing the fresh air children? Were the Caslons anything like Mr. Steele himself, in temperament, Ruth's errand would not be a pleasant one, she knew.

The orphans ran out shrieking a welcome when Tom drove into the yard of the house under the hill. Where were the "terrible twins"? Had their sister really come to see them? Were Willie and Dickie coming back to the orphanage at all?

These and a dozen other questions were hurled at Ruth. Some of the bigger girls remembered Sadie Raby and asked a multitude of questions about her. So the girl of the Red Mill contented herself at first with trying to reply to all these queries.

Then Mrs. Caslon appeared from the kitchen, wiping her hands of dish-water, and the old farmer himself came from the stables. Their friendly greeting and smiling faces opened the way for Ruth's task. She threw herself, figuratively speaking, into their arms.

"I know you are both just as kind as you can be," said Ruth, eagerly, "and you won't mind if I ask you to change your program a little to-day for the youngsters? They want to give them all a good time up at Sunrise Farm."

"Good land!" exclaimed Mrs. Caslon. "Not *all* of them?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Ruth, and she sketched briefly the idea of the celebration on the hill-top, including the presents she and Tom were to buy in Darrowtown for the kiddies.

"My soul and body!" exclaimed the farmer's

wife. "That lady, Mis' Steele, don't know what she's runnin' into, does she, Father?"

"I reckon not," chuckled Mr. Caslon, wagging his head.

"But you won't mind? You'll let us have the children?" asked Ruth, anxiously.

"Why——" Mrs. Caslon looked at the old gentleman. But he was shaking all over with inward mirth.

"Do 'em good, Mother—do 'em good," he chuckled—and he did not mean the fresh air children, either. Ruth could see that.

"It'll be a mortal shame," began Mrs. Caslon, again, but once more her husband interrupted:

"Don't you fuss about other folks, Mother," he said, gravely. "It'll do 'em good—mebbe—as I say. Nothin' like tryin' a game once by the way. And I bet twelve little tykes like these 'uns will keep that Steele man hoppin' for a while."

"But his poor wife——"

"Don't you worry, Mrs. Caslon," Ruth urged, but wishing to laugh, too. "We girls will take care of the kiddies, and Mrs. Steele sha'n't be bothered too much."

"Besides," drawled Mr. Caslon, "the woman's got a good sized family of her own—there's six or seven of 'em, ain't there?" he demanded of Ruth.

"Eight, sir."

"But that don't make a speck of difference," the farmer's wife interposed. "She's always had plenty of maids and the like to look out for them. She don't know——"

"Let her learn a little, then," said Mr. Caslon, good naturedly enough. "It'll do both him and her good. And it'll give you a rest for a few hours, Mother.

"Besides," added Mr. Caslon, with another deep chuckle, "I hear Steele has been rantin' around about takin' the kids to board just for the sake of spitin' the neighbors. Now, if he thinks boardin' a dozen young'uns like these is all fun——"

"Don't be harsh, John," urged Mrs. Caslon.

"I ain't! I ain't!" cried the farmer, laughing again. "But they're bitin' off a big chaw, and it tickles me to see 'em do it."

It was arranged, therefore, that the orphans should be ready to go up to Sunrise Farm that afternoon. Then Ruth and Tom drove to Darrowtown. They had a fast horse, and got over the rough road at a very good pace.

Tom drove first around into the side street where Miss True Pettis's little cottage was situated.

"You dear child!" was the little spinster's greeting. "Are you having a nice time with your rich friends at Sunrise Farm? Tell me all about

them—and the farm. Everybody in Darrowtown is that curious!"

Tom had driven away to attend to the errands he could do alone, so Ruth could afford the time to visit a bit with her old friend. The felon was better, and that fact being assured, Ruth considered it better to satisfy Miss Pettis regarding the Sunrise Farm folk before getting to the Raby orphans.

And that was the way to get to them, too. For the story of the tempest the day before, and the appearance of Sadie Raby, the runaway, and her reunion with the twins, naturally came into the tale Ruth had to tell—a tale that was eagerly listened to and as greatly enjoyed by the Darrowtown seamstress, as one can well imagine.

"Just like a book—or a movie," sighed Miss Pettis, shaking her head. "It's really wonderful, Ruthie Fielding, what's happened to you since you left us here in Darrowtown. But, I always said, this town is dead and nothing really happens *here!*"

"But it's lovely in Darrowtown," declared Ruth. "And just to think! Those Raby children lived here once."

"No?"

"Yes they did. Sadie was six or seven years old, I guess, when they left here. Tom Raby was her father. He was a mason's helper——"

"Don't you tell me another thing about 'em!" cried Miss Pettis, starting up suddenly. "Now you remind me. I remember them well. Mis' Raby was as nice a woman as ever stepped—but weakly. And Tom Raby——

"Why, how could I forget it? And after that man from Canady came to trace 'em, too, only three years ago. Didn't you ever hear of it, Ruth?"

"What man?" asked Ruth, quite bewildered now. "Are—are you sure it was the same family? And *who* would want to trace them?"

"Lemme see. Listen!" commanded Miss Pettis. "You answer me about these poor children."

And under the seamstress's skillful questioning Ruth related every detail she knew about the Raby orphans—and Mr. Steele, in her presence, had cross-questioned Sadie exhaustively the evening before. The story lost nothing in Ruth's telling, for she had a retentive memory.

"My goodness me, Ruthie!" ejaculated the spinster, excitedly. "It's the same folks—sure. Why, do you know, they came from Quebec, and there's some property they've fell heir to—property from their mother's side—Oh, let me tell you! Funny you never heard us talkin' about that Canady lawyer while you was livin' here with me. My!"

CHAPTER XX

THE RABY ROMANCE

Miss True Pettis thrilled with the joy of telling the romance. The little seamstress had been all her life entertaining people with the dry details of unimportant neighborhood happenings. It was only once in a long while that a story like that of the Rabys' came within her ken.

"Why, do you believe me!" she said to Ruth, "that Mis' Raby came of quite a nice family in Quebec. Not to say Tom Raby wasn't a fine man, for he was, but he warn't educated much and his trade didn't bring 'em more'n a livin'. But her folks had school teachers, and doctors, and even ministers in their family—yes, indeed!

"And it seems like, so the Canady lawyer said, that a minister in the family what was an uncle of Mis' Raby's, left her and her children some property. It was in what he called 'the fun's'—that's like stocks an' bonds, I reckon. But them Canadians talk different from us.

"Well, I can remember that man—tall, lean man he was, with a yaller mustache. He had traced the Rabys to Darrowtown, and he saw

the minister, and Deacon Giles, and Amoskeag Lanfell, askin' did they know where the Rabys went when they moved away from here.

"I was workin' for Amoskeag's wife that day, so I heard all the talk," pursued Miss Pettis. "He said—this Canady lawyer did—that the property amounted to several thousand dollars. It was left by the minister (who had no family of his own) to his niece, Mis' Raby, or to her children if she was dead.

"Course they asked me if *I* knowed what became of the family," said the spinster, with some pride. "It bein' well known here in Darrowtown that I'm most as good as a parish register—and why wouldn't I be? Everybody expects me to know all the news. But if I ever *did* know where them Rabys went, I'd forgot, and I told the lawyer man so.

"But he give me his card and axed me to write to him if I ever heard anything further from 'em, or about 'em. And I certain sure would have have done so," decleared Miss Pettis, "if it had ever come to my mind."

"Have you the gentleman's card now, Miss True?" asked Ruth, eagerly.

"I s'pect so."

"Will you find it? I know Mr. Steele is interested in the Rabys, and he can communicate with this Canadian lawyer——"

"Now! ain't you a bright girl?" cried the spinster. "Of course!"

She at once began to hustle about, turning things out of her bureau drawers, searching the cubby holes of an old maple "secretary" that had set in the corner of the kitchen since her father's time, discovering things which she had mislaid for years—and forgotten—but not coming upon the card in question right away.

"Of course I've got it," she declared. "I never lose anything—I never throw a scrap of anything away that might come of use——"

And still she rummaged. Tom came back with the cart and Ruth had to go shopping. "But do look, Miss Pettis," she begged, "and we'll stop again before we go back to the farm."

Tom and she were some time selecting a dozen timely, funny, and attractive nicknacks for the fresh airs. But they succeeded at last, and Ruth was sure the girls would be pleased with their selections.

"So much better than spending the money for noise and a powder smell," added Ruth.

"Humph! the kids would like the noise all right," sniffed Tom. "I heard those little chaps begging Mr. Caslon for punk and firecrackers. That old farmer was a boy himself once, and I bet he got something for them that will smell of powder, beside the little tad of fireworks he showed me."

"Oh! I hope they won't any of them get burned."

"Kind of put a damper on the 'safe and sane Fourth' Mr. Steele spoke about, eh?" chuckled Tom.

Miss Pettis was looking out of the window and smiling at them when they arrived back at the cottage. She held in her hand a yellowed bit of pasteboard, which she passed to the eager Ruth.

"Where do you suppose I found it, Ruthie?" she demanded.

"I couldn't guess."

"Why, stuck right into the corner of my lookin'-glass in my bedroom. I s'pose I have handled it every day I've dusted that glass for three year, an' then couldn't remember where it was. Ain't that the beatenes'?"

Ruth and Tom drove off in high excitement. She had already told Master Tom all about the Raby romance—such details as he did not already know—and now they both looked at the yellowed business card before Ruth put it safely away in her pocket:

MR. ANGUS MACDOROUGH
Solicitor
13, King Crescent, Quebec

"Mr. Steele will go right ahead with this, I know," said Tom, nodding. "He's taken a fancy to those kids——"

"Well! he ought to, to Sadie!" cried Ruth.

"Sure. And he's a generous man, after all. Too bad he's taken such a dislike to old Caslon."

"Oh, dear, Tom! we ought to fix that," sighed Ruth.

"Crickey! you'd tackle any job in the world, I believe, Ruthie, if you thought you could help folks."

"Nonsense! But both of them—both Mr. Steele and Mr. Caslon—are such awfully nice people——"

"Well! there's not much hope, I guess. Mr. Steele's lawyer is trying to find a flaw in Caslon's title. It seems that, way back, a long time ago, some of the Caslons got poor, or careless, and the farm was sold for taxes. It was never properly straightened out—on the county records, anyway—and the lawyer is trying to see if he can't buy up the interest of whoever bought the farm in at that time—or their heirs—and so have some kind of a basis for a suit against old Caslon."

"Goodness! that's not very clear," said Ruth, staring.

"No. It's pretty muddy. But you know how some lawyers are. And Mr. Steele is willing to

hire the shyster to do it. He thinks it's all right. It's business."

"*Your* father wouldn't do such a thing, Tom!" cried Ruth.

"No. I hope he wouldn't, anyway," said Master Tom, wagging his head. "But I couldn't say that to Bobbins when he told me about it, could I?"

"No call to. But, oh, dear! I hope Mr. Steele won't be successful. I do hope he won't be."

"Same here," grunted Tom. "Just the same, he's a nice man, and I like him."

"Yes—so do I," admitted Ruth. "But I'd like him so much more, if he wouldn't try to get the best of an old man like Mr. Caslon."

The Raby matter, however, was a more pleasant topic of conversation for the two friends. The big bay horse got over the ground rapidly—Tom said the creature did not know a hill when he saw one!—and it still lacked half an hour of noon when they came in sight of Caslon's house.

The orphans were all in force in the front yard. Mr. Caslon appeared, too.

That yard was untidy for the first time since Ruth had seen it. And most of the untidiness was caused by telltale bits of red, yellow, and green paper. Even before the cart came to the gate, Ruth smelled the tang of powder smoke.

"Oh, Tom! they *have* got firecrackers," she exclaimed.

"So have I—a whole box full—under the front seat," chuckled Tom. "What's the Fourth without a weeny bit of noise? Bobbins and I are going to let them off in a big hogshead he's found behind the stable."

"You boys are rascals!" breathed Ruth. "Why! there are the twins!"

Sadie's young brothers ran out to the cart. Mr. Caslon appeared with a good-sized box in his arms, too.

"Just take this—and the youngsters—aboard, will you, young fellow?" said the farmer. "Might as well have all the rockets and such up there on the hill. They'll show off better. And the twins was down for the clean clo'es mother promised them."

It was a two-seated cart and there was plenty of room for the two boys on the back seat. Mr. Caslon carefully placed the open box in the bottom of the cart, between the seats. The fireworks he had purchased had been taken out of their wrappings and were placed loosely in the box.

"There ye are," said the farmer, jovially. "Hop up here, youngsters!"

He seized Willie and hoisted him into the seat. But Dickie had run around to the other side of

the cart and clambered up like a monkey, to join his brother.

"All right, sir," said Tom, wheeling the eager bay horse. It was nearing time for the latter's oats, and he smelled them! "Out of the way, kids. They'll send a wagon down for you, all right, after luncheon, I reckon."

Just then Ruth happened to notice something smoking in Dickie's hand.

"What have you there, child?" she demanded. "Not a nasty cigarette?"

He held out, solemnly, and as usual wordlessly, a smoking bit of punk.

"Where did you get that? Oh! drop it!" cried Ruth, fearing for the fireworks and the explosives under the front seat. She meant for Dickie to throw it out of the wagon, but the youngster took the command literally.

He dropped it. He dropped it right into the box of fireworks. Then things began to happen!

CHAPTER XXI

A VERY BUSY TIME

"Oh, Tom!" shrieked Ruth, and seized the boy's arm. The bay horse was just plunging ahead, eager to be off for the stable and his manger. The high cart was whirled through the gateway as the first explosion came!

Pop,pop,pop! sputter—BANG!

It seemed as though the horse leaped more than his own length, and yanked all four wheels of the cart off the ground. There was a chorus of screams in the Caslons' dooryard, but after that first cry, Ruth kept silent.

The rockets shot out of the box amidships with a shower of sparks. The Roman candles sprayed their varied colored balls—dimmed now by daylight—all about the cart.

Tom hung to the lines desperately, but the scared horse had taken the bit in his teeth and was galloping up the road toward Sunrise Farm, quite out of hand.

After that first grab at Tom's arm, Ruth did not interfere with him. She turned about, knelt on the seat-cushion, and, one after the other,

swept the twins across the sputtering, shooting bunch of fireworks, and into the space between her and Tom and the dashboard.

Providentially the shooting rockets headed into the air, and to the rear. As the big horse dashed up the hill, swinging the light vehicle from side to side behind him, there was left behind a trail of smoke and fire that (had it been night-time) would have been a brilliant spectacle.

Mr. Caslon and the orphans started after the amazing thing tearing up the road—but to no purpose. Nothing could be done to stop the explosion now. The sparks flew all about. Although Mr. Caslon had bought a wealth of small rockets, candles, mines, flower-pots, and the like, never had so many pieces been discharged in so short a time!

It was sputter, sputter, bang, bang, the cart vomiting flame and smoke, while the horse became a perfectly frenzied creature, urged on by the noise behind him. Tom could only cling to the reins, Ruth clung to the twins, and all by good providence were saved from an overturn.

All the time—and, of course, the half-mile or more from Caslons' to the entrance to the Steele estate, was covered in a very few moments—all the time Ruth was praying that the fire-crackers Tom had bought and hidden under the front seat would not be ignited.

The reports of the rockets, and the like, became desultory. Some set pieces and triangles went off with the hissing of snakes. Was the explosion over?

So it seemed, and the maddened horse turned in at the gateway. The cart went in on two wheels, but it did not overturn.

The race had begun to tell on the bay. He was covered with foam and his pace was slackening. Perhaps the peril was over—Ruth drew a long breath for the first time since the horse had made its initial jump.

And then—with startling suddenness—there was a sputter and bang! Off went the fire-crackers, package after package. A spark had burned through the paper wrapper and soon there was such a popping under that front seat as shamed the former explosions!

Had the horse been able to run any faster, undoubtedly he would have done so; but as the cart went tearing up the drive toward the front of the big house, the display of fireworks, etc., behind the front seat, and the display of alarm on the part of the four on the seat, advertised to all beholders that the occasion was not, to say the least, a common one.

The cart itself was scorched and was afire in places, the sputtering of the fire-crackers continued while the horse tore up the hill. Tom had

bought a generous supply and it took some time for them all to explode.

Fortunately the front drop of the seat was a solid panel of deal, or Ruth's skirt might have caught on fire—or perhaps the legs of the twins would have been burned.

As for the two little fellows, they never even squealed! Their eyes shone, they had lost their caps in the back of the cart, their short curls blew out straight in the wind, and their cheeks glowed. When the runaway appeared over the crest of the hill and the crowd at Sunrise Farm beheld them, it was evident that Willie and Dickie were enjoying themselves to the full!

Poor Tom, on whose young shoulders the responsibility of the whole affair rested, was braced back, with his feet against the footboard, the lines wrapped around his wrists, and holding the maddened horse in to the best of his ability.

Bobbins on one side, and Ralph Tingley on the other, ran into the roadway and caught the runaway by the bridle. The bay was, perhaps, quite willing to halt by this time. Mr. Steele ran out, and his first exclamation was:

"My goodness, Tom Cameron! you've finished that horse!"

"I hope not, sir," panted Tom, rather pale. "But I thought he'd finish us before he got through."

By this time the explosions had ceased. Everything of an explosive nature—saving the twins themselves—in the cart seemed to have gone off. And now Willie ejaculated:

"Gee! I never rode so fast before. Wasn't it great, Dickie?"

"Yep," agreed Master Dickie, with rather more emphasis than usual.

Sister Sadie appeared from the rear premises, vastly excited, too, but when she lifted the twins down and found not a scratch upon them, she turned to Ruth with a delighted face.

"You took care of them just like you loved 'em, Miss," she whispered, as Ruth tumbled out of the cart, too, into her arms. "Oh, dear! don't you dare get sick—you ain't hurt, are you?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Ruth, having hard work to crowd back the tears. "But I'm almost scared to death. That—that young one!" and she grabbed at Dickie. "What did you drop that punk into the fireworks for?"

"Huh?" questioned the imperturbable Dickie.

"Why didn't you throw that lighted punk away?" and Ruth was tempted to shake the little rascal.

But instantly the voluble Willie shouldered his way to the front. "Gee, Miss! he thought you wanted him to drop it right there. You said so. An'—an'—— Well, he didn't know the things

in the box would go off of themselves. Did you, Dickie?"

"Nope," responded his twin.

"Do forgive 'em, Miss Ruth," whispered Sadie Raby. "I wouldn't want Mr. Steele to get after 'em. You know—he can be sumpin' fierce!"

"Well," sighed Ruth Fielding, "they're the 'terrible twins' right enough. Oh, Tom!" she added, as young Cameron came to her to shake hands.

"You're getting better and better," said Tom, grinning. "I'd rather be in a wreck with you, Ruthie—of almost any kind—than with anybody else I know. Those kids don't even know what you saved them from, when you dragged 'em over the back of that seat."

"Sh!" she begged, softly.

"And it's a wonder we weren't all blown to glory!"

"It was a mercy we were not seriously hurt," agreed Ruth.

But then there was too much bustle and general talk for them to discuss the incident quietly. The horse was led away to the stable and there attended to. Fortunately he was not really injured, but the cart would have to go to the painter's.

"A fine beginning for this celebration we have on hand," declared Mr. Steele, looking ruefully

at his wife. "If all that can happen with only two of those fresh air kids, as Bob calls them, on hand, what do you suppose will happen to-night when we have a dozen at Sunrise Farm?"

"Mercy!" gasped the lady. "I am trembling in my shoes—I am, indeed. But we have agreed to do it, Father, and we must carry it through."

CHAPTER XXII

THE TERRIBLE TWINS ON THE RAMPAGE

THE girls who had come to Sunrise Farm to visit at Madge Steele's invitation, felt no little responsibility when it came to the entertainment for the fresh air orphans. As The Fox said, with her usual decision:

"Now that we've put Madge and her folks into this business, we'll just have to back up their play, and make sure that the fresh airs don't tear the place down. And that Sadie will have to keep an eye on the 'terrible twins.' Is that right?"

"I've spoken to poor Sadie," said Ruth, with a sigh. "I am afraid that Mrs. Steele is very much worried over what may occur to-night, while the children are here. We'll have to be on the watch all the time."

"I should say!" exclaimed Heavy Stone. "Let's suggest to Mr. Steele that he rope off a place out front where he is going to have the fireworks. Some of those little rascals will want to help celebrate, the way Willie and Dickie did," and the plump girl giggled ecstatically.

"'Twas no laughing matter, Jennie," complained Ruth, shaking her head.

"Well, that's all right," Lluella broke in. "If Tom hadn't bought the fire-crackers—and that was right against Mr. Steele's advice——"

"Oh, here now!" interrupted Helen, loyal to her twin. "Tom wasn't any more to blame than Bobbins. They were just bought for a joke."

"It was a joke all right," Belle said, laughing. "Who's going to pay for the damage to the cart?"

"Now, let's not get to bickering," urged Ruth. "What's done, is done. We must plan now to make the celebration this afternoon and evening as easy for Mrs. Steele as possible."

This conversation went on after luncheon, while Bob and Tom had driven down the hill with a big wagon to bring up the ten remaining orphans from Mr. Caslon's place.

The gaily decorated wagon came in sight just about this time. Fortunately the decorations Tom and Ruth had purchased that forenoon in Darrowtown had not been destroyed when the fireworks went off in the cart.

The girls from Briarwood Hall welcomed the fresh airs cheerfully and took entire charge of the six little girls. The little boys did not wish to play "girls' games" on the lawn, and therefore

Bob and his chums agreed to keep an eye on the youngsters, including the "terrible twins."

Sadie had been drafted to assist Madge and her mother, and some of the maids, in preparing for the evening collation. Therefore the visitors were divided for the time into two bands.

The girls from the orphanage were quiet enough and well behaved when separated from their boy friends. Indeed, on the lawn and under the big tent Mr. Steele had had erected, the celebration of a "safe and sane" Fourth went on in a most commendable way.

It was a very hot afternoon, and after indulging in a ball game in the field behind the stables, Bobbins, in a thoughtless moment, suggested a swim. Half a mile away there was a pond in a hollow. The boys had been there almost every day for a dip, and Bob's suggestion was hailed—even by the usually thoughtful Tom Cameron—with satisfaction.

"What about the kids?" demanded Ralph Tingley.

"Let them come along," said Bobbins.

"Sure," urged Busy Izzy. "What harm can come to them? We'll keep our eyes on them."

The twins and their small chums from the orphanage were eager to go to the pond, too, and so expressed themselves. The half-mile walk through the hot sun did not make them quail.

They were proud to be allowed to accompany the bigger boys to the swimming hole.

The little fellows raced along in their bare feet behind the bigger boys and were pleased enough, until they reached the pond and learned that they would only be allowed to go in wading, while the others slipped into their bathing trunks and "went in all over."

"No! you can't go in," declared Bobbins, who put his foot down with decision, having his own small brothers in mind. (They had been left behind, by the way, to be dressed for the evening.)

"Say! the water won't wet us no more'n it does you—will it, Dickie?" demanded the talkative twin.

"Nope," agreed his brother.

"Now, you kids keep your clothes on," said Bob, threateningly. "And don't wade more than to your knees. If you get your overalls wet, you'll hear about it. You know Mrs. Caslon fixed you all up for the afternoon and told you to keep clean."

The smaller chaps were unhappy. That was plain. They paddled their dusty feet in the water for a while, but the sight of the older lads diving and swimming and having such a good time in the pond was a continual temptation. The active minds of the terrible twins were soon at work.

Willie began to whisper to Dickie, and the latter nodded his head solemnly.

"Say!" blurted out Willie, finally, as Bob and Tom were racing past them in a boisterous game of "tag." "We wanter go back. This ain't no fun—is it, Dickie?"

"Nope," said his twin.

"Go on back, if you want to. You know the path," said Bobbins, breathlessly.

"We're goin', too," said one of the other fresh airs.

"We'd rather play with the girls than stay here. Hadn't we, Dickie?" proposed Willie Raby.

"Yep," agreed Master Dickie, with due solemnity.

"Go on!" cried Bob. "And see you go straight back to the house. My!" he added to Tom, "but those kids are a nuisance."

"Think we ought to let them go alone?" queried Tom, with some faint doubt on the subject. "You reckon they'll be all right, Bobbins?"

"Great Scott! they sure know the way to the house," said Bob. "It's a straight path."

But, as it happened, the twins had no idea of going straight to the house. The pond was fed by a stream that ran in from the east. The little fellows had seen this, and Willie's idea was to circle around through the woods and find that

stream. There they could go in bathing like the bigger boys, "and nobody would ever know."

"Our heads will be wet," objected one of the orphans.

"Gee!" said Willie Raby, "don't let's wet our heads. We ain't got to—have we?"

"Nope," said his brother, promptly.

There was some doubt, still, in the minds of the other boys.

"What you goin' to say to those folks up to the big house?" demanded one of the fresh airs.

"Ain't goin' to say nothin'," declared the bold Willie. "Cause why? they ain't goin' to know—'nless you fellers snitch."

"Aw, who's goin' to snitch?" cried the objector, angered at once by the accusation of the worst crime in all the category of boyhood. "We ain't no tattle-tales—are we, Jim?"

"Naw. We're as safe to hold our tongues as you an' yer brother are, Willie Raby—so now!"

"Sure we are!" agreed the other orphans.

"Then come along," urged the talkative twin. "Nobody's got to know."

"Suppose yer sister finds it out?" sneered one.

"Aw—well—she jes' ain't go'n' ter," cried Willie, exasperated. "An' what if she does? She runned away herself—didn't she?"

The spirit of restlessness was strong in the Raby nature, it was evident. Willie was a born

leader. The others trailed after him when he left the pathway that led directly back to Sunrise Farm, and pushed into the thicker wood in the direction he believed the stream lay.

The juvenile leader of the party did not know (how should he?) that just above the pond the stream which fed it made a sharp turn. Its waters came out of a deep gorge, lying in an entirely different direction from that toward which the "terrible twins" and their chums were aiming.

The little fellows plodded on for a long time, and the sun dropped suddenly behind the hills to the westward, and there they were—quite surprisingly to themselves—in a strange and fast-darkening forest.

CHAPTER XXIII

LOST

THE girl visitors from Briarwood Hall did all they could to help the mistress of Sunrise Farm and Madge prepare for the evening festivities, and not alone in employing the attention of the six little girls from the orphanage.

There were the decorations to arrange, and the paper lanterns to hang, and the long tables on the porch to prepare for the supper. Twelve extra, hungry little mouths to feed was, of itself, a fact of no small importance.

When the wagon had come up from Caslon's with the orphans, Mrs. Steele had thought it rather a liberty on the part of the farmer's wife because she had, with the children, sent a great hamper of cakes, which she (Mrs. Caslon) herself had baked the day before.

But the cakes were so good, and already the children were so hungry, that the worried mistress of the big farm was thankful that these supplies were in her pantry.

"When the boys come back from the pond, I expect they will be ravenous, too," sighed the

good lady. "*Do* you think, Madge, that there will be enough ham and tongue sandwiches for supper? I am sure of the cream and cake—thanks to that good old woman (though I hope your father won't hear me say it). But that is to be served after the fireworks. They will want something hearty at suppertime—and goodness me, Madge! It is five o'clock now. Those boys should be back from their swim."

As for Mr. Steele, he was immensely satisfied with the celebration of the day so far. To tell the truth, he had very little to do with the work of getting ready for the orphans' entertainment. Aside from the explosion of the fireworks in the cart, the occasion had been a perfectly "safe and sane" celebration of a holiday that he usually looked forward to with no little dread.

Before anybody really began to worry over their delay, the boys came into view. They had had a refreshing swim and announced the state of their appetites the moment they joined the girls at the big tent.

"Yes, yes," said Madge, "we know all about that, Bobbie dear. But his little tootie-wootsums must wait till hims gets his bib put on, an' let sister see if his hannies is nice and clean. Can't sit down to eat if hims a dirty boy," and she rumpled her big brother's hair, while he looked foolish enough over her "baby talk."

"Don't be ridiculous, Madge," said Helen, briskly. "Of course they are hungry—— But where's the rest of them?"

"The rest of what?" demanded Busy Izzy. "I guess we're all here."

"Say! you *must* be hungry," chuckled Heavy. "Did you eat the kids?"

"What kids?" snapped Tom, in sudden alarm.

"The fresh airs, of course. The 'terrible twins' and their mates. My goodness!" cried Ann Hicks, "you didn't forget and leave them down there at the pond, did you?"

The boys looked at each other for a moment. "What's the joke?" Bobbins finally drawled.

"It's no joke," Ruth said, quickly. "You don't mean to say that you forgot those little boys?"

"Now, stop that, Ruth Fielding!" cried Isadore Phelps, very red in the face. "A joke's a joke; but don't push it too far. You know very well those kids came back up here more'n an hour ago."

"They didn't do any such thing," cried Sadie, having heard the discussion, and now running out to the tent. "They haven't been near the house since you big boys took them to the pond. Now, say! what d'ye know about it?"

"They're playing a trick on us," declared Tom, gloomily.

"Let's hunt out in the stables, and around," suggested Ralph Tingley, feebly.

"Maybe they went back to Caslon's," Isadore said, hopefully.

"We'll find out about that pretty quick," said Madge. "I'll tell father and he'll send somebody down to see if they went there."

"Come on, boys!" exclaimed Tom, starting for the rear of the house. "Those little scamps are fooling us."

"Suppose they *have* wandered away into the woods?" breathed Ruth to Helen. "Whatever shall we do?"

Sadie could not wait. She was unable to remain idle, when it was possible that the twin brothers she had so lately rejoined, were in danger. She flashed after the boys and hunted the stables, too.

Nobody there had seen the "fresh airs" since they had followed the bigger boys to the pond.

"And ye sure didn't leave 'em down there?" demanded Sadie Raby of Tom.

"Goodness me! No!" exclaimed Tom. "They couldn't go in swimming as we did, and so they got mad and wouldn't stay. But they started right up this way, and we thought they were all right."

"They might have slanted off and gone across the fields to Caslon's," said Bobbins, doubtfully.

"That would have taken them into the back pasture where Caslon keeps his Angoras—wouldn't it?" demanded the much-worried young man.

"Well, you can go look for 'em with the goats," snapped Sadie, starting off. "But me for that Caslon place. If they didn't go there, then they are in the woods somewhere."

She started down the hill, fleet-footed as a dog. Before Mr. Steele had stopped sputtering over the catastrophe, and bethought him to start somebody for the Caslon premises to make inquiries, Sadie came in view again, with the old, gray-mustached farmer in tow.

The serious look on Mr. Caslon's face was enough for all those waiting at Sunrise Farm to realize that the absent children were actually lost. Tom and Bobbins had come up from the goat pasture without having seen, or heard, the six little fellows.

"I forgot to tell ye," said Caslon, seriously, "that ye had to keep one eye at least on them 'terrible twins' all the time. We locked 'em into their bedroom at night. No knowin' when or where they're likely to break out. But I reckoned this here sister of theirs would keep 'em close to her——"

"Well!" snapped Sadie Raby, eyeing Tom and Bobbins with much disfavor, "I thought that

a bunch of big fellers like them could look after half a dozen little mites."

Mr. Steele had come forward slowly; the fact that the six orphan boys really seemed to be lost, was an occasion to break down even *his* barrier of dislike for the neighbor. Besides, Mr. Caslon ignored any difference there might be between them in a most generous manner.

"I blame myself, Neighbor Steele—I sure do," Mr. Caslon said, before the owner of Sunrise Farm could speak. "I'd ought to warned you about them twins. They got bit by the runaway bug bad—that's right."

"Humph! a family trait—is it?" demanded Mr. Steele, rather grimly eyeing the sister of the runaways.

"I couldn't say about that," chuckled the farmer. "But Willie and Dickie started off twice from our place, trailin' most of the other kids with 'em. But I caught 'em in time. Now, their sister tells me, they've got at least an hour and a half's start."

"It is getting dark—or it will soon be," said Mr. Steele, nervously. "If they are not found before night, I shall be greatly disturbed. I feel as though I were responsible. My oldest boy, here——"

"Now, it ain't nobody's fault, like enough," interrupted Mr. Caslon, cheerfully, and seeing

Bobbins's woebegone face. "We'll start right out and hunt for them."

"But if it grows dark——"

"Let me have what men you can spare, and all the lanterns around the place," said Caslon, briskly, taking charge of the matter on the instant. "These bigger boys can help."

"I—I can go with you, sir," began Mr. Steele, but the farmer waved him back.

"No. You ain't used to the woods—nor to trampin'—like I be. And it won't hurt your boys. You leave it to us—we'll find 'em."

Mrs. Steele had retired to the tent on the lawn in tears, and most of the girls were gathered about her. Sadie Raby clung to Farmer Caslon's side, and nobody tried to call her back.

Since returning from Darrowtown that morning, Ruth Fielding had divulged to Mr. Steele all she had discovered through Miss True Pettis regarding the Raby family, and about the Canadian lawyer who had once searched for Mrs. Raby and her children.

The gentleman had expressed deep interest in the matter, and while the fresh air children were being entertained during the afternoon, Mr. Steele had already set in motion an effort to learn the whereabouts of Mr. Angus MacDorough and to discover just what the property was

that had been willed to the mother of the Raby orphans.

Sadie had been told nothing about this wonderful discovery as yet. Indeed, there had been no time. Sadie had been busy, with Mrs. Steele and the others, in preparing for that "safe and sane" celebration with which Mr. Steele had desired to entertain the "terrible twins" and their little companions at Sunrise Farm.

Now this sudden catastrophe had occurred. The loss of the six little boys was no small trouble. It threatened to be a tragedy.

Down there beyond the pond the mountainside was heavily timbered, and there were many dangerous ravines and sudden precipies over which a careless foot might stray.

Dusk was coming on. In the wood it would already be dark. And if the frightened children went plunging about, seeking, in terror, to escape, they might at any moment be cast into some pit where the searchers would possibly never find them.

Mr. Steele felt his responsibility gravely. He was, at best, a nervous man, and this happening assumed the very gravest outlines in his anxious mind.

"Never ought to have let them out of my own sight," he sputtered, having Ruth for a confidant.

"I might have known something extraordinary would happen. It was a crazy thing to have all those children up here, anyway."

"Oh, dear, Mr. Steele!" cried Ruth, much worried, "*that* is partly my fault. I was one of those who suggested it."

"Nonsense! nonsense, child! Nobody blames you," returned the gentleman. "I should have put my foot down and said 'No.' Nobody influenced me at all. Why—why, I *wanted* to give the poor little kiddies a nice time. And now—see what has come of it?"

"Oh, it may be that they will be found almost at once," cried Ruth, hopefully. "I am sure Mr. Caslon will do what he can——"

"Caslon's an eminently practical man—yes, indeed," admitted Mr. Steele, and not grudgingly. "If anybody can find them, he will, I have no doubt."

And this commendation of the neighbor whom he so disliked struck Ruth completely silent for the time being.

CHAPTER XXIV

"SO THAT'S ALL RIGHT"

"AND here it is 'ong past suppertime," groaned Heavy; "it's getting darker every minute, and the fireworks ought to be set off, and we can't do a thing!"

"Who'd have the heart to eat, with those children wandering out there in the woods?" snapped Mercy Curtis.

"What's *heart* got to do with eating?" grumbled the plump girl. "And I was thinking quite as much of the little girls here as I was of myself. Why! here is one of the poor kiddies asleep, I do declare."

The party in the big tent was pretty solemn. Even the six little girls from the orphanage could not play, or laugh, under the present circumstances. And, in addition, it looked as though all the fun for the evening would be spoiled.

The searching party had been gone an hour. Those remaining behind had seen the twinkling lanterns trail away over the edge of the hill and disappear. Now all they could see from the tent

were the stars, and the fireflies, with now and then a rocket soaring heavenward from some distant farm, or hamlet, where the Glorious Fourth was being fittingly celebrated.

Madge and Helen came out with a hamper of sandwiches and there was lemonade, but not even the little folk ate with an appetite. The day which, at Sunrise Farm, was planned to be so memorable, threatened now to be remembered for a very unhappy cause.

Down in the wood lot that extended from below some of Mr. Steele's hayfields clear into the next township, the little party of searchers, led by old Mr. Caslon, had separated into parties of two each, to comb the wilderness.

None of the men knew the wood as did Mr. Caslon, and of course the boys and Sadie (who had refused to go back) were quite unfamiliar with it.

"Don't go out of sight of the flash of each other's lanterns," advised the farmer.

And by sticking to this rule it was not likely that any of the sorely troubled searchers would, themselves, be lost. As they floundered through the thick undergrowth, they shouted, now and then, as loudly as they could. But nothing but the echoes, and the startled nightbirds, replied.

Again and again they called for the lost boys by name. Sadie's shrill voice carried as far as

anybody's, without doubt, and her crying for "Willie" and "Dickie" should have brought those delinquents to light, had they heard her.

Sadie stuck close to Mr. Caslon, as he told her to. But the way through the brush was harder for the girl than for the rest of them. Thick mats of greenbriars halted them. They were torn, and scratched, and stung by the vegetable pests; yet Sadie made no complaint.

As for the mosquitoes and other stinging insects—well, they were out on this night, it seemed, in full force. They buzzed around the heads of the searchers in clouds, attracted by the lanterns. Above, in the trees, complaining owls hooted their objections to the searchers' presence in the forest. The whip-poor-wills reiterated their determination from dead limbs or rotting fence posts. And in the wet places the deep-voiced frogs gave tongue in many minor keys.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Sadie to the farmer, "the little fellers will be scared half to death when they hear all these critters."

"And how about you?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm used to 'em. Why, I've slept out in places as bad as this more'n one night. But Willie and Dickie ain't used to it."

One end of the line of searchers touched the pond. They shouted that information to the others, and then they all pushed on. It was in

the mind of all that, perhaps, the children had circled back to the pond.

But their shouts brought no hoped-for reply, although they echoed across the open water, and were answered eyriely from the farther shore.

There were six couples; therefore the line extended for a long way into the wood, and swept a wide area. They marched on, bursting through the vines and climbers, searching thick patches of jungle, and often shouting in chorus till the wood rang again.

Tom and one of the stablemen, who were at the lower end of the line, finally came to the mouth of that gorge out of which the brook sprang. To the east of this opening lay a considerable valley and it was decided to search this vale thoroughly before following the stream higher.

It was well they did so, for half a mile farther on, Tom and his companion made a discovery. They came upon the tall, blasted trunk of a huge old tree that had a great hollow at its foot. This hollow was blinded by a growth of vines and brush, yet as Tom flashed his lantern upon it, it seemed to him as though the vines had been disturbed.

"It may be the lair of some animal, sir," suggested the stableman, as Tom attempted to peer in.

"Nothing much more dangerous than foxes in these woods now, I am told," returned the boy. "And this is not a fox's burrow—hello!"

His sudden, delighted shriek rang through the wood and up the hillside.

"I've found them! I've found them!" the boy repeated, and dived into the hollow tree.

His lantern showed him and the stableman the six wanderers rolled up like kittens in a nest. They opened their eyes sleepily, yawning and blinking. One began to snivel, but Willie Raby at once delivered a sharp punch to that one, saying, in grand disgust:

"Baby! Didn't I tell you they'd come for us? They was sure to—wasn't they, Dickie?"

"Yep," responded that youngster, quite as cool about it as his brother.

Tom's shouts brought the rest of the party in a hurry. Mr. Caslon hauled each "fresh air" out by the collar and stood him on his feet. When he had counted them twice over to make sure, he said:

"Well, sir! of all the young scamps that ever were born—Willie Raby! weren't you scared?"

"Nope," declared Willie. "Some of these other kids begun ter snivel when it got dark; but Dickie an' me would ha' licked 'em if they'd kep' that up. Then we found that good place to sleep——"

"But suppose it had been the bed of some animal?" asked Bobbins, chuckling.

"Nope," said Willie, shaking his head. "There was spider webs all over the hole we went in at, so we knowed nobody had been there much lately. And it was a pretty good place to sleep. Only it was too warm in there at first. I couldn't get to sleep right away."

"But you didn't hear us shouting for you?" queried one of the other searchers.

"Nope. I got to sleep. You see, I thought about bears an' burglars an' goblins, an' all those sort o' things, an' that made me shiver, so I went to sleep," declared the earnest twin.

A shout of laughter greeted this statement. The searchers picked up the little fellows and carried them down to the edge of the pond, where the way was much clearer, and so on to the plain path to Sunrise Farm.

So delighted were they to have found the six youngsters without a scratch upon them, that nobody—not even Mr. Caslon—thought to ask the runaways how they had come to wander so far from Sunrise Farm.

It was ten o'clock when the party arrived at the big house on the hill. Isadore had run ahead to tell the good news and everybody was aroused—even to the six fellow-orphans of the runaways—to welcome the wanderers.

"My goodness! let's have the fireworks and celebrate their return," exclaimed Madge.

But Mr. Steele quickly put his foot down on that.

"I am afraid that Willie and Dickie, and Jim and the rest of them, ought really to be punished for their escapade, and the trouble and fright they have given us," declared the proprietor of Sunrise Farm.

"However, perhaps going without their supper and postponing the rest of the celebration until to-morrow night, will be punishment enough. But don't you let me hear of you six boys trying to run away again, while you remain with Mr. and Mrs. Caslon," and he shook a threatening finger at the wanderers.

"Now Mr. and Mrs. Caslon will take you home," for the big wagon had been driven around from the stables while he was speaking. Mrs. Caslon, too worried to remain in doubt about the fresh airs, had trudged away up the hill to Sunrise Farm, while the party was out in search of the lost ones.

Mrs. Steele and the girls bade a cordial good-night to the farmer's wife, as she climbed up to the front seat of the vehicle on one side. On the other, Mr. Steele stopped Mr. Caslon before he could climb up.

"The women folks have arranged for you and

your wife to come to-morrow evening and help take care of these little mischiefs, while we finish the celebration," said the rich man, with a detaining hand upon Mr. Caslon's shoulder. "We need you."

"I reckon so, neighbor," said the farmer, chuckling. "We're a little more used to them lively young eels than you be."

"And—and we want you and your wife to come for your own sakes," added Mr. Steele, in some confusion. "We haven't even been acquainted before, sir. I consider that I am at fault, Caslon. I hope you'll overlook it and—and—as you say yourself—*be neighborly.*"

"Sure! Of course!" exclaimed the old man, heartily. "Ain't no need of two neighbors bein' at outs, Mr. Steele. You'll find that soft words butter more parsnips than any other kind. If you an' I ain't jest agreed on ev'ry p'int, let's get together an' settle it ourselves. No need of lawyers' work in it," and the old farmer climbed nimbly to the high seat, and the wagon load of cheering, laughing youngsters started down the hill.

"And so *that's* all right," exclaimed the delighted Ruth, who had heard the conversation between the two men, and could scarcely hide her delight in it.

"I feel like dancing," she said to Helen. "I just *know* Mr. Steele and Mr. Caslon will under-

stand each other after this, and that there will be no quarrel between them over the farms."

Which later results proved to be true. Not many months afterward, Madge wrote to Ruth that her father and the old farmer had come to a very satisfactory agreement. Mr. Caslon had agreed to sell the old homestead to Mr. Steele for a certain price, retaining a life occupancy of it for himself and wife, and, in addition, the farmer was to take over the general superintendency of Sunrise Farm for Mr. Steele, on a yearly salary.

"So much for the work of the 'terrible twins'!" Ruth declared when she heard this, for the girl of the Red Mill did not realize how much she, herself, had to do with bringing about Mr. Steele's change of attitude toward his neighbor.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ORPHANS' FORTUNE

A GREAT deal happened at Sunrise Farm before these later occurrences which so delighted Ruth Fielding. The excitement of the loss of the six "fresh airs" was not easily forgotten. Whenever any of the orphans was on the Sunrise premises again, they had a bodyguard of older girls or boys who kept a bright lookout that nothing unusual happened to them.

As for the twins, Sadie took them in hand with a reformatory spirit that amazed Willie and Dickie. Those two youngsters were kept at Sunrise Farm and put in special charge of Sadie. Thus Mr. Steele had the three Raby orphans under his own eye until he could hear from Canada, and from the orphanage, and learn all the particulars of the fortune that might be in store for them.

After a bit Willie and Dickie found the watchfulness of their sister somewhat irksome.

"Say!" the talkative twin observed, "you ain't got no reason to be so sharp on us, Sadie Raby. *You* run away your ownself — didn't she, Dickie?"

"Yep," agreed the oracular one.

"An' we don't want no gal follerin' us around and tellin' us to 'stop' all the time—do we, Dickie?"

"Nope."

"We're big boys now," declared Willie, strutting like the young bantam he was. "There ain't nothin' goin' to hurt us. We're too big——"

"What's that on your finger—— No! the other one?" snapped Sadie, eyeing Willie sharply.

"Scratch," announced the boy.

"Where'd you get it?"

"I—I cut it on the cat," admitted Willie, with less bombast.

"Humph! you're a big boy—ain't you? Don't even know enough to let the cat alone—and I hope her claw done you some good. Come here an' let me borrer Miss Ruth's peroxide bottle and put some on it. Cat's claws is poison," said Sadie. "You ain't so fit to get along without somebody watchin' you as ye think, kid. Remember that, now."

"We don't want no gal trailin' after us all the time!" cried Willie, angrily. "An' we ain't goin' to stand it," and he kicked his bare toe into the sand to express the emphasis that his voice would not vent.

"Humph!" said Sadie, eyeing him sideways, meanwhile trimming carefully a stout branch she

had broken from the lilac bush. "So you want to be your own boss, do you, Willie Raby?"

"We *be* our own boss—ain't we, Dickie?"

For the first time, the echo of Dickie's agreement failed to materialize. Dickie was eyeing that lilac sprout—and looked from that to his sister's determined face. He backed away several feet and put his hands behind him.

"And so you ain't goin' to mind me—nor Miss Ruth—nor Mr. Steele—nor Mr. Caslon—nor nobody?" proceeded Sadie, more earnestness apparent in each section of her query.

Her hand reached out suddenly and gripped Willie by the shoulder of his shirt. He tried to writhe out of her grasp, but his sister's muscles were hardened, and she was twice as strong as Willie had believed. The lilac sprout was raised.

"So you're too big to mind anybody, heh?" she queried.

"Yes, we be!" snarled the writhing Willie. "Ain't we, Dickie?"

"No, we're not!" screamed his twin, suddenly, refusing to echo Willie's declaration. "Don't hit him, Sade! Oh, don't!" and he cast himself upon his sister and held her tight about the waist. "We—we'll be good," he sobbed.

"How about it, Willie Raby?" demanded the stern sister, without lowering the stick. "Are you goin' to mind and be good?"

Willie stared, tried to writhe away, saw it was no use, and capitulated. "Aw—yes—if *he's* goin' to cry about it," he grumbled. He said it with an air intimating that Dickie was, after all, quite a millstone about his neck and would always be holding him back from deeds of valor which Willie, himself, knew he could perform.

However, the twins behaved pretty well after that. They remained with Sadie at Sunrise Farm, for the whole Steele family had become interested in them.

The inquiries Mr. Steele set afoot resulted, in a short time, in information of surprising moment to the three Raby orphans. The old inquiry which had brought the lawyer, Mr. Angus MacDorough, to Darrowtown three years before, was ferreted out by another lawyer engaged by Mr. Steele.

It was found that Mr. MacDorough had, soon after his visit to the States in the matter of the Raby fortune, been stricken ill and, after a long sickness, had died. His affairs had never been straightened out, and his business was still in a chaotic state.

However, it was found beyond a doubt that Mr. MacDorough had been engaged to search out the whereabouts of Mrs. Tom Raby and her children by the administrators of the estate of Mrs.

Raby's elderly relative, now some time deceased.

Nearly two thousand dollars in American money had been left as a legacy to the Rabys. In time this property was put into Mr. Steele's care to hold in trust for the three orphans—and it was enough to promise them all an education and a start in life.

Had it not been so, Mr. and Mrs. Steele would have felt sufficiently in Sadie's debt, because of her having saved little Bennie Steele from the hoofs of the Black Douglass, to have made the girl's way—and that of the twins—plain before them, until they were grown.

How much Ruth Fielding and her chum, Helen, were delighted b yall this can be imagined. Sadie held an almost worshipful attitude toward Ruth; Ruth had been her first real friend when she ran away from "them Perkinses."

That Ruth and her chum bore the affairs of the Raby orphans in mind, and continued to have many other and varied interests, as well as a multitude of adventures during the summer, will be explained in the next volume of our series, to be entitled: "Ruth Fielding and the Gypsies; Or, The Missing Pearl Necklace."

Meanwhile, the visit to Sunrise Farm came to a glorious close. The belated Fourth of July was celebrated on the evening of the fifth, in a perfectly "safe and sane" manner by the burn-

ing of the wealth of fireworks that Mr. Steele had supplied.

The days that followed to the end of the stay of the girls of Briarwood Hall and their brothers, were filled with delightful incidents. Picnics, fishing parties, tramps over the hills, rides, games on the lawn, and many other activities occupied the delightful hours at Sunrise Farm.

"This surely is the nicest place I ever was at," Busy Izzy admitted, on the closing day of the party. "If I have as good a time the rest of the summer, I won't mind going back to school and suffering for eight months in the year."

"Hear! hear!" cried Heavy Jennie Stone. "And the eats!"

"And the rides," said Mercy Curtis, the lame girl. "Such beautiful rides through the hills!"

"And such a fine time watching those fresh airs to see that they didn't kill themselves," added Tom Cameron, with a grimace.

"Don't say a word against the poor little dears, Tommy," urged his sister. "Suppose *you* had to live in an orphange all but four weeks in the year?

"Tom is only fooling," Ruth said, quietly. "I know him. He enjoyed seeing the children have a good time, too."

"Oh! if you say so, Miss Fielding," said Tom, laughing and bowing to her, "it must be so."

The big yellow coach, with the four prancing horses, came around to the door. Bobbins mounted to the driver's seat and gathered up the ribbons. The visitors climbed aboard.

Ruth stood up and waved her hand to the rest of the Steele family, and Sadie and the twins gathered on the porch.

"We've had the finest time ever!" she cried. "We love you all for giving us such a nice vacation. And we're going to cheer you——"

And cheer they did. At the noise, the leaders sprang forward and the yellow coach rolled away. Ruth, laughing, sat down suddenly beside her chum, and Helen hugged her tight.

"We always have a dandy time when we go anywhere with *you,* Ruth," she declared. "For you always take your 'good times' with you."

And perhaps Helen Cameron had made a very important discovery.

THE END

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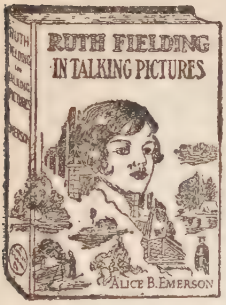

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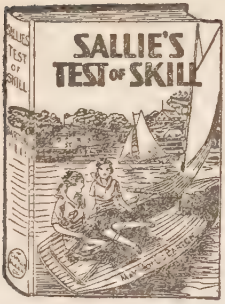

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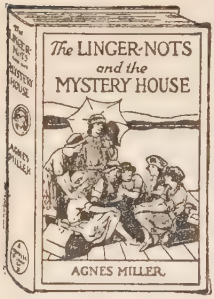

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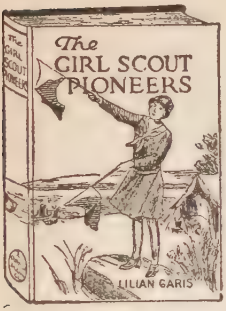

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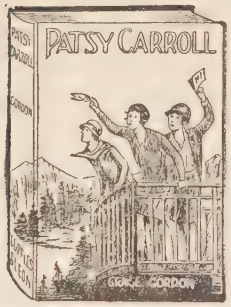

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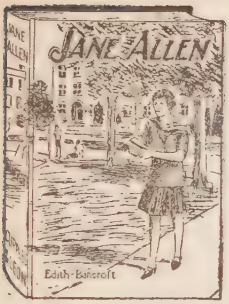

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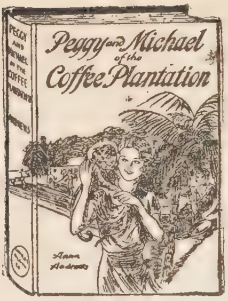

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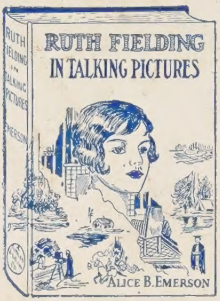

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